'colliers, negroes, demons, or whichever you fear most':

Exploring legacies of non-white race and non-cis gender

in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, its adaptations and in fanworks

by

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A photograph of protestors at Trans Pride in June 2021 marching outside the Sondheim theatre, where *Les Misérables* is on stage. Signs read: "we are dying but all you wanna talk about is toilets and sports", "giving trans folk rights won't take away yours" and "protect trans kids". Enxi Chang, a British-Chinese transfemme holds her sign in line with the *Les Misérables* signage. The faces of other protestors have been blurred to protect privacy.

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Abstract

In this thesis I investigate the treatment of non-white race and non-cis gender within Victor Hugo's 1862 novel *Les Misérables,* its adaptations and in fanworks*.* I begin by establishing the racial and gendered canon of *Les Misérables*, especially the misappropriation of the vocabulary of enslavement, the Goodness of white female beauty and the criminality assigned to Black and Indigenous peoples. I then turn to three adaptations made in the winter of 2018/9: Ladj Ly's *Les Misérables*, the BBC production written by Andrew Davies and Fuji TV's レ・ミゼラブル 終わりなき旅路 [*Les Misérables a Never Ending Journey*] to explore how three writers from different cultural backgrounds make *Les Misérables* 'relevant' to their audiences. This includes the restitution of power towards Black humanity, the perpetuation of racial stereotypes hidden behind 'colour blind' casting, and fanfiction-like divergences used to create political meta-textual messages. In the third part I use interviews with fans of colour and data collected from the social media sites *tumblr* and *ArchiveofOurOwn* to track how Hugo's language of race and racism remains embedded in *Les Misérables* fanworks even while its fans work to become a liberal, anti-racist fandom. I conclude with a critical re-reading of Hugo's novel that 'unsilences' race and gender identity in *Les Misérables* to argue that the novel is full of queer, racial possibilities that are both plentiful and overdue.

Content Warnings

This thesis discusses race, racism and gendered stereotypes. There is consistent reference to racist language and ideologies, most especially towards Black, South Asian, Indigenous American, Jewish, Muslim, East Asian and Rromani peoples. There is a racist caricature of a Black man depicted in the figures. There are discussions of enslavement, police brutality, incarceration and the sexual trafficking of children. There are death mentions, including the completion of suicide and familial loss. There are two mentions of rape. There is a description of spousal abuse. Ableism and transphobia are mentioned throughout.

Declaration of Authorship

I Nemo Madeleine Sugimoto Martin hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: Nemo Madeleine Sugimoto Martin

Date: 8 October 2023

Abbreviations

AO3 – ArchiveOfOurOwn
ARoS – A Reflection of Starlight
BAME – Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic
BBCMis – *Les Misérables* (the BBC and PBS 2018/9 adaptation)
BLM – Black Lives Matter
LM – *Les Misérables*
LyMis – *Les Misérables* (the adaptation directed by Ladj Ly, 2019)
Owarinaki – *Les Misérables: Owarinaki Tabiji* (the Fuji Television 2019 adaptation)
OTW – The Organisation for Transformative Works
TPoC – Transgender Person of Colour

Note on Translations and Language Used

Unless otherwise stated, excerpts from the novel are referenced in English from the Julie Rose translation published by Vintage Classic (2009). These include (Part, Book, Chapter, Page Number) references. For example, (V,3,ii,1050-1) refers to: Part Five, Book Three, Chapter Two, Pages 1050-1. I quote from the original French when considering specific language or word use using the *Les Misérables* edition edited by Yves Gohin, published by Gallimard (2017). When doing so the page number is preceded by LM, for example, (LM 401). I briefly refer to the English translations by Christine Donougher (Penguin Classics, 2015), indicated by (CD:LM) and Charles Wilbour (Wordsworth Editions, 1994), indicated by (CW:LM). Where translations of French are my own, they have been corrected by Hannah Thompson.

Japanese text is presented in Japanese, transliterated into rōmaji. Japanese names are presented in the surname forename configuration. Transcriptions, translations and transliterations of Japanese are my own with corrections by Sen.

Helen Gould provided sensitivity reading for language used to describe Black hair textures and skin colour. Descriptions are subjective, and as it was beyond my ability to contact every person discussed to describe themselves (as is best practise in providing image descriptions), all descriptions are my own and should not be taken as authoritative.

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Introduction

Victor Hugo's 1862 novel *Les Misérables (*hereafter *LM*) is a well-studied text. With criticism and adaptation across the globe since its publication (Llosa 2), it 'has flourished as part of our international consciousness' perhaps more than any other work of Western literature (Grossman 1994, 2), becoming part of the 'mythography of the international landscape' (Grossman 2001, 486). It is popular because Hugo has never ceased to 'have an effect upon people' (Roche 2007, 2), making people 'of all languages and cultures desire a more just, rational, and beautiful world than they live in' (Llosa 177). As a popular classic that has been adapted into the era of online content, there is a real impossibility in putting a precise number on the 'abundance of versions' that now exist (Grossman and Stephens 2016, 3). These adaptations are often 'profoundly opposed to the spirit' of the original (Robb 1998, xiv), but *LM*'s greatest ability is to make audiences see the novel as '*their* story'; to take ownership of it and make it interact with 'their own biographical, social, and historical situations' (Grossman and Stephens 2016, 9). Yet if we were to watch most adaptations of *LM* or read critical analysis of the novel and its legacies, it would be easy to assume that non-white race and non-cis gender have no canonical place in either Hugo's novel or in the works of its adaptors and fans – that these are not also realities for the world. I argue in this thesis that canonical non-white racial and non-cis gender formulations are crucial to the characters, politics and legacies of Hugo's novel, and I identify how and why these legacies are 'silenced' as *LM* continues to be adapted, criticised and loved to this day.

Colonisation and orientalism have been studied within Hugo's other works, most notably in *Les Orientales* and *Bug Jargal* (Bongie 2017; Yee 2016; Prasad 2009; Grossman 1994), but these topics remain understudied in *LM*. Various authors have noted when Black

characters appear in *LM* (Robb 1998; Grossman 1994), commented on enslaved Black

people in the novel (Grossman 1994, 2016; Gleizes; Bellos; Robb 1998), and race has been

briefly touched upon in response to casting, mostly in consideration of the stage show

(Robbins; Whitfield 2021), but there has been no full-length study on the racialisation of the

characters of *LM*, nor of the persistent use of blackness as metaphor. Cis, binary gender in

LM has been considered through feminist perspectives (Gasiglia-Laster; Lewis 2015, 2016;

Savy; Ní Riordáin; Roche 2016; Stephens 2019), and there has been some recent

consideration of same-sex (mostly male/male) attraction within adaptations of the novel

(Roberts 2023; Kenyon; Stephens 2022), but as Stephens argues, while 'a more gender-

oriented reading of canonical male writers has slowly been undertaken since the

theorization of 'queerness' in the 1990s, Hugo has yet to receive such attention (2019, 5-6).

While *Les Misérables and Its Afterlives* analyses the evolution of *LM* adaptions, this volume

only briefly mentions the contribution of fandom (Grossman and Stephens 2016, 3;

Beaghton 154; Stephens 2016a, 203), and does not get into the specifics of non-white race

or non-cis gender. Though Grossman wrote a considerable amount about Valjean's

androgyny in 1991, and Stephens notes that Hugo 'troubles the kind of essentialism that

powers a categorical [binary] gender order' (2019, 8), there has been no specifically

transgender reading of the novel's characters, and there is more to be said about gender

roles as our vocabulary and concepts have progressed over the course of the last 25 years.

To carry out a transgender reading of any text is rare within the field of Queer Theory,

where readings are typically gay, lesbian or otherwise sexuality focused. Even within

Transgender Studies Quarterly, very few articles offer trans-specific literary analysis. In 2023,

Jennifer Duggan and Angie Fazekas edited a 'Trans Fandom' special issue of *Transformative*

Works and Cultures, which addressed how there has been 'surprisingly little work' that

focuses specifically on 'trans fans, trans ways of doing fandom, and depictions of trans bodies within fan works', and positioned itself as the first special issue to do so while acknowledging genders outside of a binary concept (Duggan and Fazekas, 1.1-2). In 2012, Gatson and Reid stated that 'the scholarship on fandom has an immense gap when it comes to dealing with race' (4.12), and both Hellekson and Busse's 2014 *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader* and Coppa's 2017 *The Fanfiction Reader* display this treatment of race in fandom as 'something that should be addressed somewhere later' (Wanzo 1.6).

This thesis therefore devotes itself to two key areas understudied within Hugo criticism: 1) analysis of 'canonical' instances of race and racism and intertwined queer gender expression within *LM,* and 2) how these descriptions have survived in the minds of fans and adaptors into the present day.

I could have opted to choose either race *or* gender as a key consideration within this thesis, but I operate from the perspective that both race and gender are colonial concepts intrinsically bound to one another. Following Roderick A. Ferguson, this thesis is a queer of colour critique, which debunks the idea that 'race, class, gender, and sexuality are discrete formations, apparently insulated from one another' or that racial and national formulations are disconnected (4). As I will touch on throughout, categories like white femininity, Black masculinity and East Asian androgyny are specific tools used to control groups of people, and as such what constitutes a 'male' or 'female' quality is inseparable from racial formulation. I choose therefore to describe a range of experiences including interplay with class, sexuality, and geographical location instead of focusing on one in greater detail because I want to consider as many intersectional identities as possible with the intent to redefine what we consider 'canonical'. Focusing solely on one aspect of identity would undermine the thesis's core: the contention that *LM* is full of queer, racial possibilities. I

believe that this thesis operates as a beginning: a way to start considering more readings that avoid white, cisgender heteronormativity as default.

SHAME AND EUPHORIA

My initial hypothesis was that by analysing how fan communities have purposefully transformed the characters in a piece of Classic Literature into transgender people of colour (TPoC),[1] I would be able to argue that fans generate more culturally relevant adaptations of Hugo's nineteenth century 'social asphyxia' (preface, xlv), and that these fan canons would guide a 'euphoric' reading of the novel. This was borne out of a desire to see more critical work unpick the instinctive, colonial assumption that to be a TPoC is an inherently negative experience and originated from recent work by transgender thinkers in changing political and cultural perspectives on what it means to be 'trans' (Howitt; Malatino 13; Faye 137), rejecting the idea that trans people are 'self-loathing, isolated, and yearning for assimilation' when they are not outright villains (Page 1.2). Just as no two cisgender people experience gender in the same way, neither do two transgender people. Many trans people now agree that dysphoria is a symptom of societal barriers, and that dysphoria is not the sole indicator of trans identity, positing that a less harmful way to self-identify gender identity is through 'euphoria'. When a person feels exhilarated by a sense of *identity euphoria*: a trans girl adoring herself, a non-binary person able to shift between gender presentation with fluidity, we see a healthier way to begin conversations about gender identity. By prioritising pride

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[1] Chen uses 'trans of color' to name 'solidarity and kinship between those who experience embodiment as a form of racial gender displacement and subjugation within radically different *yet interrelated* transnational U.S. histories and systems of genocide, captivity, colonization, and imperialism' (5). I use the term similarly, broadening slightly to the UK and to France.

and excitement in our root conception of transness, we radically undermine the concept that being trans is shameful, sad and disgusting. Ledbetter has a similar methodology, identifying three affects of 'political dysphoria', and explores how these might help fan creators 'name and resolve these dissonances through fiction'. These three affects are '(1) relief: naming dysphoric feelings, (2) rage: rebelling against conditions that produce dysphoric feelings, and (3) euphoria: imagining structures that inspire consonant feelings' (Ledbetter 5.1). By employing this purposeful change in attitude and language towards a purposefully euphoric reading of *LM*, I planned to shift the cultural weight of self-hatred and shame from the shoulders of both the fictional sufferers of *LM,* and from the 'contemporary reality' (McCarthy *et al.* 94) of transgender readers of colour who are affected by the language and impact of Hugo's novel and its legacies to this day.

It is with disappointment that I have since had to re-assess the ability to do completely euphoric readings over the course of this research project. As Wanzo argues, it is often 'love—and at times disappointment—that can produce scholarship that really articulates the intellectual stakes of a work' (Wanzo 4.1). This thesis is one borne from a love of fandom, balanced with the equal disappointment that fans of colour feel from within it. One persistent issue in using these fanworks to discuss racialisation is a lack of self-awareness in a predominantly white fandom regarding which characters are racialised and in what ways; where those with darker skin are consistently aligned with violence, self-hatred and hypersexualisation, while those with lighter skin become angelic, diminutive and beautiful. As Alexis Lothian states, the 'intersection of race and gender is crucial to a lot of the terminology that comes up in discussions of race in fandom, particularly because much of the discussion takes place in online spaces that are dominated by white women' (in TWC Editor "Pattern Recognition" 4.1). Though there are moments of euphoria analysed in the

work below, I believe there are too few previous studies of these Othering portrayals for me to meaningfully engage with an outright euphoric school of thought here. It is my desire that this work becomes a starting place to build upon for future euphoric works, and that we can build beyond shame, self-hatred and monstrosity as a starting point for reading non-white racial and non-cis gender identity. Therefore, while the priority here is no longer euphoria, moments of positivity are woven throughout this thesis to give a sense of future possibilities.

MINI-METHODOLOGY

Because each chapter sits within slightly different fields of research, I have placed my literature reviews and methodologies at the beginning of each chapter so that relevant conversations are grouped with the corresponding chapter.

Throughout this thesis I quote from shooting scripts, tweets, tumblr posts, fanfiction and other non-traditional sources because they break down the boundaries between private opinion and published thought. Social media posts, typically intended for a user's circle, can reflect fan opinion and discourse in a way a newspaper review cannot, and can be studied as part of netnography, described by Kozinets as the 'the human element of online human and technological interaction, social interaction and experience' (243). As Rendell notes, these social media posts often 'reflect' and/or 'refract' academic criticism by framing them within 'wider sociopolitical discourse's (2.17). Social media quotes are referenced by the @ symbol and username, for example (@UserExample). I mention scenes that were cut from scripts because these reflect the writer's voice in a way the filmed, edited pieces often do not. I state when I do this to make clear what was produced and what remained unfilmed. I quote from interviews I have conducted throughout this thesis. I have attached

the transcript of my interview with Hideya Hamada (Appendix 3) conducted through email correspondence in Japanese, attached with English translation.

Race is a 'notoriously slippery term with a long and fraught history' that was 'being invented' in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Prasad 15). I will touch on how I formulate 'race' throughout this thesis, which changes in relation to context. Within race I consider colourism, culture, diaspora, mixed-raceness, ethnicity, religion, clothing and taxonomic features, amongst other, plural, conceptions of what it means to be racialised. What is important to note is that 'whiteness' is also a race, and thus this thesis touches also on the creation of a 'white' identity.

Finally, I note at the outset that disability studies was central to the conception of the argument of this work, but my analysis of disability within *LM* became too bounteous for the scope of this thesis, and so I hope to return to this in future research.

WHAT IS CANON?

Though canon has its history in the concept of Biblical canon, I define 'canon' as fandom terminology. One fan dictionary describes the fan conception of canon as:

> All of the events which *expressly* happen in the fandom. Meaning, everything, person, event, statement, that happens in the show, movie, or book is canon (Fanspeak Dictionary "canon", emphasis theirs).

Anything that does not happen within the text but is widely considered a truism in a fan space is then 'adopted by other fans wholesale' and referred to as 'fanon' (Coppa 5). As an example, many fans consider Sherlock to be autistic, even if Arthur Conan Doyle did not diagnose him as such within his novels. There must be some aspect of believability for this

to become fanon: Sherlock's brilliant mind and social abilities can be used to demonstrate his fan-diagnosed neurodiversity. Completely out-of-the-box suggestions might then be termed 'headcanon' (a private canon that happens within a fan's own head), or even as 'crack' when the purpose of the suggestion is for comedic effect rather than as a meta-textual reading. As Ahuvia Kahane tracks, concepts of 'canon' and 'fanon' are ever-evolving within both fan and Acafan[2] communities, especially as an idea gains 'fans or supporters and respondents of its own and is inducted or subsumed into the canon' (Kahane 3.2). After the release of *Our Flag Means Death*, showrunner David Jenkins replied to fans on Twitter who had asked for clarification of fanon, some of which then turned 'canon' because of his confirmation of their analysis. In this thesis, I consider the events and characters of the novel *Les Misérables* as published in its unabridged form in French the 'canon'. In this thesis' second and third chapters on adaptation and fandom, I analyse how characterisations, lines, performances and racial characteristics from adaptations have come to be considered 'canonical'. I consider things 'fanon' when they are concepts widely accepted as being from/of *LM* even if not written by Hugo himself.

I talk throughout this thesis more about fan production than the negotiated relationship between fans and producers, as this thesis is more interested in the intra-community aspect of fan racism. What is useful to note for this work is that one of the reasons the fandom I consider here originates is due to the desire of mostly-female fans to resist socio-cultural hierarchies in their lives (Jenkins 278), using their fanworks to 'express the complaints of consumers' and the 'disappointment they feel toward much of popular culture' (273). In doing so, fanworks can be seen as either transforming the fan's 'trauma or

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[2] A portmanteau of Academic-Fan. Allegedly coined by Henry Jenkins, though he disputes this (Jenkins viii).

playfully reimagining mass media for [the sexual pleasure of] other women' but either way, 'it's hard to say they aren't taking control of the text' (Coppa 49). Fan scholars have long been cautious to cast fans as ideologically superior, asserting that fandom does not necessarily represent 'a progressive force or that the solutions fans propose are […] consistent and coherent' (Jenkins 283). I will consider in Chapter Three is how these fans go on to use their fan space to replicate power dynamics within their fandoms as they experiment with this new-found control.

TRANSLATION / ADAPTATION / FANWORK

This thesis works between translation, adaptation and fanwork studies. Greenall and Løfaldli argue that both translation and adaptation are a form of recontextualization, of 'inserting an element from one context into another' (Greenall and Løfaldli 240). They use Per Linell's *Approaching Dialogue* to consider how recontextualization, adaptation, and translation are sense-making practises, highlighting how the prefix 're-' in recontextualization is not the prefix of 'again', as in reprint (which implies repetition without change) but the 're' of transformation: the 're' of reform, revise, and rework (Greenall and Løfaldli 241). I will use this idea of recontextualization throughout this work because it is a helpful reminder that adaptations are not static and have never been shielded from one another. Recontextualization and fidelity are not at odds with one another; indeed I argue that the choice to recontextualize shows an awareness and understanding of how to use the source text to communicate unadaptable contextual information to one's audience. I also use Jeremy Strong's description of adaptations as interpretations or 'readings' done by director or actors in their 'versions', which asserts 'the status of the original as a viable, self-

sufficient, and living entity' rather than as a dead text in need of revitalisation (Strong 178).

This model deprivileges the idea that there is a single correct way to adapt a text, which

assumes an audience is a homogenous group with only one context that might be resonated

with by a single adapter. Similarly, Linda Hutcheon uses Walter Benjamin's *The Task of the*

Translator to argue that, as in recent developments in translation theory where a translation

is 'an engagement with the original text that makes us see that text in different ways'

(Hutcheon 16), adaptation can be seen as a transaction between texts. This works in tandem

with Greenall and Løfaldli's description of adaptations as 'transformative' because of the

parallel between what we traditionally view as an adaptation and fanworks which are often

dubbed 'transformative works'. Fanworks are successful at being open to existing as

additional, as gap-filling, as re-reading and re-contextualising. 'Official' adaptations can also

be seen this way, if we treat transaction as being as worthy as fidelity. Griffiths, Stephens

and Watts agree that both reception theory (especially the consideration of participatory

cultures and fandom) and translation theory are productive conversations to be held in

tandem with adaptation theory, especially when considering 'today's new media contexts':

> While translation and adaptation are very different cultural products, their theorists
>
> have long pondered the same central questions: how best can one be faithful to a
>
> source text? How visible or invisible should the translator/adaptor be? Should one
>
> translate the culture behind a text and, if so, how? (131)

Though I do not attempt to answer these questions within this thesis, I do consider

faithfulness, the adaptor's invisibility and the translation of culture in my discussion of both

adaptation and fan transformation within this work.

The Organization for Transformative Works (OTW), the non-profit organisation behind one of the most active English-language fanfiction hosting websites Archive of Our Own (AO3), states that they were founded to 'work toward a future in which all fanworks are recognized as legal and transformative, and accepted as legitimate creative activity' ("What is the Organization for Transformative Works?"). This sentence, which incorporates ideas of legality and legitimacy, indicates the deeper rift between what are seen as 'official' adaptations and what are considered fanworks despite the transformative nature of both. Outside of fan criticism, fanworks are typically seen as somehow lesser in quality or worth than 'official' adaptations. This perception is in part because adaptations tend to be dubbed 'official' because of their production value, where fanfiction is mostly produced without budget, shared not for profit and deprecated because of their typical focus on character interactions, romances or secondary plots. Hutcheon and O'Flynn argue that with the advent of digital technology and YouTube content creation, fans can hold authority in a way never seen before, saying that 'Fan culture has taken imaginative (and economic) possession of the fate of its favorite stories' (Hutcheon xix). Beyond content generation out of obsession for the source text, some fans are paid to create content: NyxRising currently earn $1,628 a month from Patreon subscriptions for their cosplay webseries, including one series where they perform skits in *LM* cosplay, further demonstrating how the line between adaptation and fan content can be blurred.

Most fanworks are however created and distributed without financial support, and the AO3 terms of service state that 'Promotion of commercial products or activities is not allowed', which prevents the monetisation of fanfics through the site ("Terms of Service" IV. Content and Abuse Policies, B). As Coppa argues, '"fan" in this context indicates nothing about either the originality of the story elements or a story's quality; rather, it simply

distinguishes work done for love (the original meaning of amateur) from work done for money' (Coppa 3). While all works that build on Hugo's novel are transformative works and thus are both adaptations *and* fanworks, fanworks can also be defined as a 'networked creative work produced within and for a community fans' (Coppa 8), with their own set of literary devices, conventions and genres 'developed by and in community' (Coppa 9) 'amongst themselves and with scholars' (Hellekson and Busse 7). To respect that those who dub their work 'fanfiction' do so on purpose, I will consider a work published on a website like AO3 or tumblr a 'fanwork' not an 'adaptation'.

I will later look at the fanfiction *A Reflection of Starlight* (*ARoS*)*,* an ongoing work that imagines the post-novel lives of Javert and Valjean. It is certainly a fanwork as we would culturally imagine one to be: it creates a romantic relationship between the two characters, and yet it is also longer than many novels, currently sitting at 379,240 words. The author of *ARoS* uses the ingrained endnotes feature of the website to reference research including that of the nineteenth-century French prison Toulon where Valjean was incarcerated and where Javert was born. The author here demonstrates both a passion for ingraining 'historical reconstruction' within the narrative similar to Hugo's own (Carrera 851), as well as a similar process to research as Hugo, who in 1839 visited Toulon to observe prison life (Llosa 128). *ARoS* has 54,000 hits, has been translated into both Chinese and French, has a curated soundtrack and includes an ever-increasing list of fanart inspired by the piece including comics, cosplay and spin-off works written by fans of the fanfiction. This is not to argue that shorter, less 'academic' fanfictions cannot also hold merit as adaptations: the second most popular *LM* fanfiction on AO3, *How the Future's Done,* sits at a comparatively measly 12,000 words, involves the two barricade boys Enjolras and Grantaire adopting a kitten, and has more than double the hits of *ARoS,* but I use *ARoS* as a case study to give

insight into some of the human labour and production value put into fan adaptations in order to complicate the idea that producing a fanwork is of inherently less work, value, research or consideration than an 'official' adaptation.
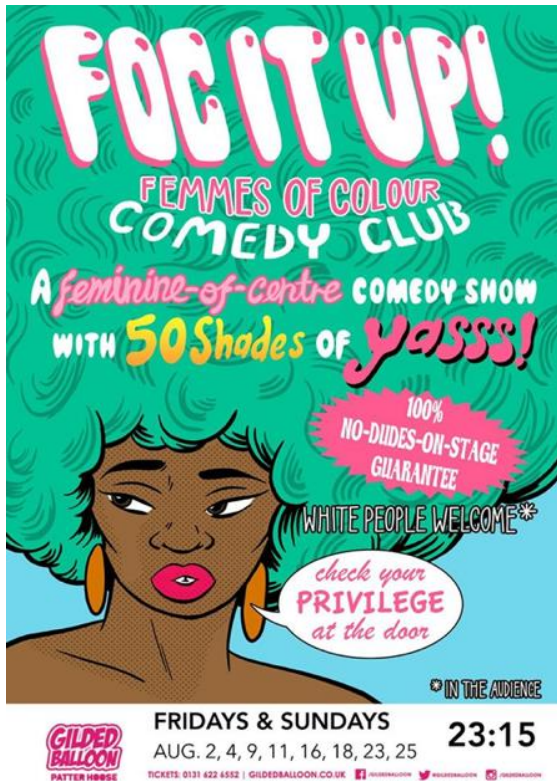
Figure 1 Poster for FOC IT UP! On a cartoon of a Black woman with a large green afro, bright red lips, a wide nose, thin, winged eyes and brown skin, bubble text reads: A feminine-of-centre comedy show with 50 shades of yasss! 100% no dudes on stage guarantee. White people welcome (in the audience). Check your privilege at the door.

POSITIONALITY

FoC It Up Comedy Club is a British touring comedy group that only bills female and non-binary Femmes of Colour (FoC). It was created in response to the lack of non-white, non-male comedians programmed at festivals and comedy clubs. On posters and in their opening statements, FoC it Up make an explicit point to state that while white people are welcome in the audience, everyone is to 'check your privilege at the door' (Figure 1). The idea of checking your privilege at the door is intended to inspire white self-reflection on white power and white entitlement, and to begin thinking about 'how much space you are taking

up' as a white audience member at an event of colour (Choudrey, 56). 'Check your privilege' is written permission to turn 'the gaze of the discriminated back on the eye of power' (Bhabha 1994, 112) and not have to be positioned as anti-white in doing so. It is not only white people who have privilege. While FoC It Up encourage non-binary and trans comediennes to perform, the language used by most of their queer-but-cis acts retains the exclusionary lexicon of stage performers, addressing the audience as 'ladies and gentlemen' and gendering audience members by appearance, slipping 'Sir's and 'Miss's into their prattle and assuming binary he/she pronouns in their asides to the audience. In attempting to legitimise their own ability as comedians, FoC It Up parody the canon of 'Dudes-On-Stage' stand-up comedy they have promised distance from, including the habits of language. McCarthy et al call this a 'strategy of resistance humour' intended to cause 'disquiet for the colonizer' (McCarthy et al, 90) by presenting the familiar in a radically post-colonialised context. I use this example of a company built by and for intersectional queer people of colour to highlight how, even in what might seem to be the epitome of an inclusive group created to disrupt white cis/heteronormativity, aims are not often achieved, and sometimes actively hurt the communities they are attempting to represent. Despite their intention to create a positive space for people of colour, FOC it Up show how difficult it is to move past the idea of creating content for cis white audiences as default.

In line with *Foc It Up*'s intentions, I would like to check my privilege by acknowledging who I am, and who I intend my audience to be. I do this because while I will refer to TPoC with the general term 'we', I do not have the lived experiences of any race or gender but my own, and do not wish to position myself as 'nobility' or as an 'institutionalized delegation' (Bordieu, 251) as if I am the spokesperson for all TPoC. This becomes part of a written agreement between myself and the reader of my acknowledged

biases and my intent to not cause more harm to those who live in an already harmful society. To do so, I considered several authors who have written about race previously. Vron Ware's *Beyond the Pale* is a dissection of white feminism's influence on the vocabulary of imperialism in the nineteenth century. Ware does not at any point declare her own racial and gender identity while she is disassembling the structures of twenty-first century white female privilege. Throughout the book, Ware asks the reader what it means when 'a white feminist aligns herself on her own terms with black women against black men' (Ware, 148), yet does not critique her own lack of objectivity. The lack of a definitive claiming of white womanhood causes problems in that it either assumes her white womanhood is default and thus read, or it is a (possibly unconscious) attempt at distancing herself from the *problematic* white feminists she analyses. As Wildman states, racism is 'something whites define as bad action by others,' which 'hides the existence of specific, identifiable beneficiaries of oppression' (Wildman 889). In contrast, before Hannah Robbins begins their chapter '"Who Tells Your Story": A Reflection on Race-Conscious Casting and the Musical', they include a note on their positionality:

> This chapter has been developed as a personal reflection that is drawn from my position as a "mixed-race" person of Black heritage in the UK. My conceptualisation of the state of casting in the global musical is situated in this context […] This chapter is presented as a snapshot of the discussions around equitable casting where I am: one of conspicuously few queer people of colour researching identity and musicals in the UK/US context.

Robbins' phrasing is one I am keen to emulate, as it gives both a contextual and personal structure to their work.

I am a non-binary, mixed-race British East Asian person. I identify as trans, as a person of colour, and as neurodivergent. Within the context of this work, it is important to note that while I deconstruct race and colourism, I am not only a member of these oppressed groups, but a beneficiary of a system that places hierarchies in relation to whiteness. I have privilege in that I am a light-skinned person with white British and Japanese ancestry, and in being a transmasculine person who does not experience transmisogyny. I am one of relatively few non-white or non-cisgender researchers in nineteenth century French literature.

HOW WE USE WORDS MATTERS

Robert Stam's *Towards a Transartistic Commons* weighs the arts (primarily cinema but touching on music, literature and the digital) in the context of our contemporary political landscape. Stam argues for the importance of creating a new school of thought that is not 'indiscriminately inclusive in embracing all of literature' (Stam 2019, 18) but that exists as a changed perspective, an act of understanding that people with different levels of privilege are actively excluded from traditional models of thought. Stam presents the key problem with this school of thought at the outset, namely that it is impossible for a single human to be aware of every text and tradition in the literary world, but states that this is not what he is advocating for. To combat previously colonialist, Eurocentric literature studies, we must deprovincialize, decolonise, reform and pluralise literary studies as it has been taught in the West (Stam 2019, 21). Stam states that he intends for his work to be 'an open forum for diverse voices in order to catalyze a conversation about the challenges and opportunities in diverse fields and from a wide array of vantage points' (Stam 2019, 14). My work sits within this forum of voices, and attempts to move away from a Eurocentric perspective of

literature which, for me, is encapsulated by the idea of white, cisgender heteronormativity as default. One through-line within Stam's work is the importance of words, as can be seen in terms like exilic, diasporic, minor, peripheral, hybrid, accented, and indigenous, which 'differ widely in their genealogies, their disciplinary affiliations, and their political affect. Each carries its own historical freight and intertextual baggage; each coaxes us in specific directions' (Stam 2019, 1). This specificity around words is integral to my writing, especially as Stam demonstrates here with words that have an ability to 'coax' an audience towards a particular ideology. Stam encourages us to question this terminology, since 'political struggle [...] always passes through language' (Stam 2019, 13). A portion of his list of questions is:

> What is at stake in these acts of naming? […] What kind of work does the term do? To whom is it addressed? For whose benefit? Whom does it include or exclude? Whom does it aggrandize or diminish, empower or disempower?

These questions will be crucial to my analysis of language in Hugo, his adaptors, translators and fans. How words are used by Hugo, what a translator translates them to, and what an adapter chooses to present have wider repercussions, which I note throughout this work. An obvious weakness in this question-answer is that both Stam and I are biased in a political direction and have our own positions that cannot allow us to know or speak for everyone (nor, I believe, should we). So while I use these questions to orientate my work, it is worth acknowledging that the answers I give are heavily based on political conversations between June 2020 and August 2023.

As part of these conversations about words, I have capitalised 'Black' in reference to race, but do not for 'white' as outlined by the Columbian Journalism Review style guide

(Laws). I will not use terminology currently considered harmful to a group of people (replaced for example with "sex worker" (Stella) and "complete suicide" (Spencer-Thomas)). I have opted not to replicate slurs in this work, choosing to follow the methodology of Mayes and Whitfield who redacted racial slurs when featured in quotation, stating that this is 'a subjective approach, but we feel it is necessary to support future Black students for whom these words continue to remove power' (2021, "Note on Language"). The most common is the slur for Rromani and Traveller peoples (Naomi), which is replaced with [g-slur] throughout when necessary. Due to the shifting nature of language and of terminology, the fact that not everyone in every group considers the reclamation of slurs as legitimate practise, and because there can be no one all-encompassing list of 'correct' terms,[3] I will reference a current, personal testimony for the use of the term when referenced where relevant.

I use the words "non-white, non-cis" instead of "global majority" and "gender-expansive" in the title of my work because I am being specific in my rejection of white cis gender. An alternate title might have been 'exploring queer, global majority identities', but I believe that this terminology creates a false homogeny in communities of colour and their position in relation to whiteness. "Global Majority" is a term that has recently come to prevalence as a way to de-centre whiteness in conversations about race and is incredibly useful in situations where the previously more common "ethnic minority" had fallen short. The purpose of "Global Majority" is fulfilled when people of multiple races, ethnicities and cultures can celebrate being part of a large, unified, celebratory body. In contrast, "non-white" has its use here in being a collective term that is not entirely unified. Multiple people

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[3] One such list, The Racial Slur Database (RSDB), relies on user-submitted entries and does not filter for tone. Many of the submitted 'Reason & Origin' entries are written to be 'comedic' (i.e. racist).

can define themselves as being non-white without becoming a homogenous group. I also commonly use 'of colour'. Following Rankine, this to me means a person who is 'not structurally white', as in not part of the structural power across institutions (267). Similarly, non-cisgender is an umbrella wider than terms like "transgender" or "gender expansive" or "gender non-conforming". It is useful because it helps me to *purposefully* centre cis whiteness as the ongoing default in Hugo studies.

In this thesis, I talk about structural racism, as well as using the term 'white supremacy', which was popularized by Peggy McIntosh in 1988 who wanted to define it as 'invisible systems conferring racial dominance on my group' (qtd in Rankine 24), exploring how she, as a white woman, benefitted. Michael Powell aggregates the opinions of mostly Black, US-American academics around the usage of the term in a 2020 piece for the *New York Times*, charting the rise in popularity in the last ten years. Some, like Ta-Nehisi Coates and Ibram X. Kendi see 'white supremacy' as an 'explanatory power that cuts through layers of euphemism […] To examine many aspects of American life once broadly seen as race neutral […] is to find a bedrock of white supremacy' (Powell "White Supremacy"). Others believe that through over-usage of the term 'the power of the phrase is lost', including Orlando Patterson who states that it 'comes from anger and hopelessness and alienates rather than converts' (*ibid*). bell hooks argues that the term is more useful than 'racism', especially when confronted with the 'liberal attitudes of white women active in feminist movement who were unlike their racist ancestors (2015, 112). hooks uses white supremacy to 'identify the ideology that most determines how white people in this society (irrespective of their political leanings to the right or left) perceive and relate to black people and other people of color' (113). I use the term here because I believe it necessary to define the invisible systems at play. With a lack of critical work on race in *LM* and its adaptations, the

novel might be considered by some as 'race neutral'; it is not. Though anecdotal, every conversation I have had since beginning this thesis has been an exercise in convincing my audience (a French nurse taking my blood, crowds of musical fans, tumblr users at a *LM* fan convention, friends and strangers with varying degrees of knowledge about the novel, the musical or a myriad of adaptations) that "race" is something that *occurs* in the novel. For these people "race" does not mean whiteness (despite white being a race), but with the rise in representation politics and the concept of colour conscious casting (as will be discussed in chapter two), it comes as a surprise to many that Hugo would include characters of colour – and that these would not feature in adaptation. This is a form of white supremacy, in which a novel as well-studied and well-adapted as *LM* can exist for 160 years and not have a significant study dedicated to its treatment of race because whiteness is deemed as default. Nothing has been as persuasive in my informal conversations about the novel as the quote I choose to head the title of the thesis. By starting with the outright, undeniable anti-Black sentiment that occurs throughout the text, my audience then typically becomes more willing to question the novel and themselves: "why did I not notice that before?" "what else did I miss?". Those who have read the text before will tell me they are going to go and re-read the novel for themselves, mind now receptive to and aware of a previously unthought-of racial dimension. Though I agree with scholars who warn that care should be extended towards the term 'white supremacy' so as to not conceal the 'primal violence and discrimination' of slavery, segregation and far-right extremist groups (John W Rogers Jr. qtd in Powell "White Supremacy"), my use of the term has in fact not inspired alienation within my mixed white/Black/non-Black-of-colour audiences but conversation and consideration that go on to influence their perception of whiteness as default in other Classic nineteenth-century novels.

When we begin to unpick the language *LM* uses about its characters and the gendered portrayals of race throughout, we find a bedrock of white supremacy in which Hugo develops a taxonomic, gender-essentialist concept of race and gender. As I will discuss further later, Marius is able to purchase his family's safety and comfort through the funding of the slave trade. While not physically purchasing a plantation or enslaved people himself, Marius knowingly gives money to a person who expresses how this will be spent. Here is another reason to use the term 'white supremacy': not because I believe Hugo's anti-abolitionism was a lie, nor because I argue he was the epitome of an Evil, conservative bigot, but because, at the end of his novel, his beautiful white characters gain their happy ending through the unseen continued kidnap and abuse of Black and Indigenous peoples in the Americas. It is white supremacy that can make casual the price paid for a young, white, French couple to maintain their freedom. Prasad states that the challenge of applying critical race theory to nineteenth century works is to:

> approach race through a contemporary critical lens while at the same time delving into epistemologies of race that are now considered outmoded. It is not possible to meet this challenge by simply treating older conceptions of race as discursive artefacts and placing words such as "mulatto" in quotation marks. Nor can we disregard eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theories of race as being entirely irrelevant today; indeed, the legacies that they have left are part of the reason why discussions of race still remain vital in the culture and politics of many plural societies across the globe (Prasad 17).

When I come to discuss the position of white fans and the culture of fandom they create, I argue that generations of fans have passed on theories, aesthetics, desires and language.

These did not develop apart from the rest of the world, but alongside stereotypes, events and politics. As Prasad observes, we do not live in a post-racial society. Neo-Nazi, conservative, anti-migrant, anti-Black, anti-LGBT politics are ideologies that have continued to work their way deeper and deeper into legal constitutions. To this day white people call the police on 'black people without cause, with full knowledge of all the ways that could go wrong and end in the loss of a life' (Rankine 173-4). Masked as they may be in sometimes 'incomprehensible' fan speak (Coppa viii), it is a naïve position to say that Hugo, his adaptors and his fans are not affected by the landscape they lived in, and these contexts are ones that position the white, cisgender, European, binary gender, heterosexual man or woman as the supreme form.

INTENTIONALITY AND BEING OF ITS TIME

Wimsatt and Beardsley argue that poetry 'is not the critic's own and not the author's (it is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it). The poem belongs to the public' (Wimsatt and Beardsley 470). Lindsay Ellis acknowledges this line of thought, but argues that in our contemporary context, readers have a moral obligation to defy this concept, observing that the Death of the Author theory is an impractical one, borne of theorists and readers who have a form of privilege:

> In a perfect world, Foucault would be right, and everyone would have equal
>
> opportunity and all texts would be judged on their own merit and not tied to either
>
> the author's identity or to their body of work. But we don't live in a perfect world,
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> *Michel*, therefore Foucault's ideas and, to a lesser extent Barthes's, can really only
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> exist in the world of pure theory. Because who tells what story, what their

background is, and why they are telling it – matters to readers, and is only mattering more as time marches on (2018).

As an example, in 1863, an anonymous reviewer at the *Southern Literary Messenger* in Massachusetts naming themselves T.W.M. wrote a long review of the first part of the novel, praising Hugo's writing, *LM's* message and its politics, relating Valjean and Fantine's struggles to contemporary court cases in the American South. T.W.M. concluded their review of an abridged translation by stating:

> One blotch alone […] has been omitted [in this translation], which may be excusable — abolitionism. But even this error we could tolerate. […] as a sincere man, a short residence at the South would soon transform M. Hugo into a potent advocate of our institutions' (T.W.M. 446).

Race, here specifically Blackness, has been a consideration in the minds of readers from the very release of *LM*. Published during the American Civil War in a pro-Slavery newspaper, T.W.M. feels the need to defend Hugo over his abolitionist message. T.W.M. states that they hold Hugo in 'pity' and 'contempt' (II,8,i,434) and suggests the *Southern* reader should consider a 'death of the author' mindset out of a deep love for the novel:

> The private actions of a writer are his own, and concern, at most, but a small circle of society; while, in proportion to his genius, his writings become the property of the universe (T.W.M. 434).

While T.W.M.'s white supremacist contemporaries censored, criticised and wished to ban *LM*, T.W.M. believed that *LM* could become palatable to a racist white reader without necessitating any changes. 'In short, so the argument went, Hugo's stance on slavery and social reform should not be an impediment to enjoying its many riches' (Grossman 2016,

117). This is likely true, for T.W.M. and Hugo use many of the same linguistic and metaphorical devices to make their points. They both play with the concept of the 'barbarian', stating the irony that white society might preach civility to the 'savage' while committing acts of violence, and they both co-opt the language of slavery in order to maintain that the white woman is the most ill-treated person in society. T.W.M., a fan of Hugo, believes that their political ideologies align, even if not perfectly.

As Ellis states, transgender authors of colour are not afforded the same luxury of philosophical objectivity that cisgender, white authors are. To see only the Great White Men as without extra-textual context means ignoring the structural, gendered racism that this disguises. Hutcheon also narrates how authorial intent has been condemned in adaptation theory, but reminds us that what these critics were protesting was authorial intent as the '*sole* arbiter and guarantee of the meaning and value of a work of art' (Hutcheon 106-7, her italics). Hutcheon states that while there has been a great increase in interest in the relevance of artistic intention 'in academic circles, despite a half-century of critical dismissal', the articulation of an adaptor's personal political position and individual 'feminist, postcolonial, ethnic, and queer' intentions is still treated as suspect (Hutcheon 94). In a perfect world, as Ellis argues, Wimsatt and Beardsley's statement that the only real critique we should have of a poem is the 'demand' that it 'works'; that is, if the poet succeeded in doing as they intended, then the poem itself will be evidence of this intent. While I agree that we must demand that an author's intent is evident in their work, I choose to *both* read para/extratextual accounts of authorial intent, *and* to read *LM* from a speculative, purposefully appropriative perspective.

As Briana Lewis convincingly argues, the death of Hugo's daughter Léopoldine had a dramatic effect on how young women are treated in *LM* (Lewis 2015). Hugo himself admits

that his regret of real-world situations directly inspired moments of the novel: in *Choses Vues,* Hugo mourned that he had once stood by as a 'woman of the streets' had been assaulted by a young dandy, and was sentenced to six months in prison.[4] He used this experience as the basis of Fantine's arrest and Valjean's argument with Javert at the police house (I,5,xii-xiii,158-167). If we can hold that Hugo's position as a mourning father and a guilt-ridden author affected his writing, we must be able to argue that his race and gender had their effects too. In acknowledging that Hugo was, in all known accounts, a cisgender, straight, white man, we can examine his work more thoroughly. As Rankine observes through rhetorical question: 'Why do people believe abolitionists could not be racist?' (21).

We thus consciously avoid falling for the 'Product of Its Time' fallacy, which as Noah Berlatsky points out, is not only 'unduly flattering to the present' by assuming we have overcome prejudice and stereotype, but also 'erases all the folks (not least Black people) who were not racist, or held different views' in the same time period as the text and its author (Berlatsky, *Atlantic*). As Yee also reminds us:

> Any account of European imperialism that focused exclusively on settler colonies would be in danger of lulling the twenty-first-century reader into a false sense that these concerns belong to the past, whereas neocolonialism, or the continuation of colonial dependency through indirect means, generally economic, is on the contrary very much with us today (Yee 2016, 3).

The imperial, colonial legacy of Hugo's writing is continued, unwittingly or not, into the twenty-first century, as we will see in Chapters Two and Three through preferences to the

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[4] Bellos notes that this was likely recorded by Hugo's wife Adèle (5).

light against the dark and in the stereotyping of the 'orient'. As Prasad states, the French

Romantic novel was paradoxical and double-edged as it was 'shaped by competing drives to

both comply with colonial expansion and challenge the imperialist project' (Prasad 3). My

argument therefore is not that Hugo is a rabid, unrepenting white colonist,[5] but that even

without glorifying 'aggressive colonial policy' (Yee 2016, 110), he (and, by proxy, his fans)

are still beneficiaries and arbitrators of colonial, imperialist mentalities. As de la Carrera

states in her analysis of Hugo's digression on the sewers, Bruneseau, 'the first official

explorer of the sewers' is able to demonstrate his mastery of translation when he is able to

'translate the language of sewers into the language of society' (de la Carrera 844-5).

Although translating from one era of French history to another, Hugo ladens the less

advanced, primitive ancestor with the language of the Orient, while the modern Frenchman

represents entrepreneurial expertise. Using the language of the expedition, Bruneseau is

able to 'battle against the disorder rampant in the sewers [and] provide them with the logic

they lack' (de la Carrera 846), a clear allegory of the colonial desire to be seen as providers

of education and order. But however hard Hugo and Bruneseau fight to 'civilize' the sewers

(and the history they represent), they will 'always be beyond control' (de la Carrera 852).

While we may argue that this implicit resistance to 'civility' is in fact an anti-colonial

perspective to bring with this metaphor, de la Carrera states that Hugo 'clearly wishes to

subordinate [discontinuities] to continuity', and I would argue that the 'miasmas' that

hamper the intrepid explorer are not intended as positive. The primitive here are not called

so ironically in order to draw attention to the hubris of the colonial mentality, but as causes

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[5] Hugo critiques colonial expansion in the body of *LM:* 'Algeria conquered too brutally and, like India by the English, with more barbarity than civilisation' (IV,1,iii,684), though celebrated 'late in life, France's vocation to colonize Africa' (Yee 2008, 44).

of frustration to the French historian like Hugo, who wishes to create a linear order of history from 'savage' to 'civilization'. When discussing how Hugo saw education as the answer to creating a utopia, Grossman considers language, but does not provide criticism on how Hugo brings an assimilationist and cultural supremacist outset to his view of universal education. Grossman quotes Hugo when he says that Paris 'makes the universal mouth speak its language, and that language becomes the world' and she notes his belief that poets, a 'modern breed of bedside heroes will forge a language that opens the way to the *République universelle* long cherished as Hugo's ideal'. 'Instead of brute force,' Grossman says, 'the "Edenization of the world"' (Grossman 1994, 231). This Edenization outlook of pen-wielding, non-physically violent poets disguises the fact that the enforcement of a European language on a people is a part of culture-destroying colonialism that places the French language above all others (Llosa 113).

The 'of its time' fallacy is thus too simple to accommodate what was already a complex debate within the period of publication, let alone for a contemporary reader. I would like this work to go some way towards unpicking Hugo's language choices without relying on the simple rejoinder that Hugo was using 'typical' and thus 'outdated' vocabulary. To do otherwise would diminish Hugo's own intelligence, readings on abolition and concepts of race. This would also flatten these concepts into the linear idea that we in the twenty-first century have a completely unconnected perspective on gender and racial formulation from those in the nineteenth, which is certainly not the case. If we 'un-silence' the language Hugo uses (Stam 2019, 47), we can thus unpick the legacies of race and gender in *LM* translations, adaptations and in fanwork.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

In Chapter One, I establish the racial and gendered canon of *LM*. I use the language of *Dungeons & Dragons* to establish Hugo's language of physiognomic taxonomy, especially in how this language is used to categorise racial and gendered difference. I consider the misappropriation of the vocabulary of enslavement to deepen pity for white bodies, the 'Goodness' intrinsic to white beauty and the criminality assigned to darkness and, thus, Black and Indigenous peoples.

Chapter Two is split into three parts as I analyse three adaptations of *LM* released within 2018/9. I consider how three creators use the same source text to make work of contemporary relevance to their audiences. In Part One I question the Eurocentric hierarchy that is assumed between Hugo and Ladj Ly, re-situating the power of an 'original' text in the hands of Black humanity. In Part Two, I unpick the idea of 'colour blind' productions, arguing that institutions like the BBC perpetuate racial stereotypes while claiming diversity. In Part Three I analyse the fanfiction-like divergences from Hugo's novel in a Japanese adaptation and argue that authorial intent makes this production more faithful to the novel than the BBC's page-to-screen adaptation.

Chapter Three is split into three parts as I analyse fanart and fanfiction to discuss which racial and gendered traits are considered 'canon' or 'fanon' within fandom, and how Hugo's language remains embedded within fanworks. Part One includes a brief history of the *LM* fandom, a methodology for my data collection through fanwork analyses and fan interviews, my positionality as an Acafan and a general overview of racism within the fandom. In Part Two I do a character-by-character analysis, showing how fans have adopted racial and gendered language to create 'diversity' that assimilates non-whiteness into colonial concepts of ambiguous ethnicity. In Part Three I take the character of Javert as a

case-study, comparing representations of him as a Rromani person to track the legacy of Hugo's racialisation from the novel to fanworks.

In Chapter Four I return to Hugo's novel to interrogate the boundaries of what we consider 'canonical' readings of the text, arguing that readings that un-silence the non-white and the non-cis as 'canon' are both plentiful and overdue.

In the Conclusion, I turn towards the West End musical's use of wigs to exemplify how race is constructed within the stage world of *LM,* noting which characters are assigned visual proximity to whiteness and which are racialised as non-white. I then consider the lyric 'nothing changes, nothing ever will' to, conversely, find hope that progress is being made within the fandom in regards to gendered racial awareness, and maintain my desire that euphoric readings of Hugo's work are developed in response to this one.

CHAPTER ONE: Character Analysis

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS & DEFINING RACE

Stam presents what he calls the scholar's quest for 'the most finely tuned and productive metaphors to illuminate the subjects at hand' (2019, 9), positing that optical metaphors like 'prisms, grids, modes, lenses, optics, windows, maps, perspectives' are associated with the 'way-of-seeing' mentality (10). We can understand this 'way of seeing' in the alignment grids of *Dungeons and Dragons (D&D)*, which condense the meta-mentality of a character not to their physical characteristics (static) or to their interpersonal relations (connectivity) but to their perspective. By creating a simple grid of alignments, we create recognisable patterns in the treatment of race and gender, understanding how Hugo regulates the world of race and gender. With the recent resurgence of *D&D* due to the popularity of eighties nostalgia in the entertainment industry, there has been an increase in fan conversations around the idea of 'alignments': a grid of nine descriptors that is a combination of the rows Lawful, Neutral or Chaotic and the columns Good, Neutral or Evil (Figure 2). Mittell calls this approach to analysing characterisation 'paratextual orientation' and it has been adopted by many fanbases, including that of *LM* (Mittell, 269). We can do this paratextual orientation with relative ease because alignment charts are founded on the racialised and highly gendered belief that it is possible to categorise groups of people into distinct, binary groups. In a 2009 post called 'Dungeons & Dragons & Racism', author The Main Event points to how *D&D* is inherently racialised:

> Just consider the underlying assumptions [players] make every time they encounter a humanoid they are familiar with. The underlying implication, that you know something about a person based on their race, is anathema to the state ethos of our

modern society, yet we play a game that not only enforces this notion, but thrives on it (The Main Event).

Not only does *D&D* follow J.R.R Tolkien's choice to use 'race' as interchangeable with 'species', a decision reminiscent of the numerous attempts to weaponize biological difference to justify slavery, apartheid and ongoing discrimination, certain *D&D* species have inherent alignments: Orcs and Drow, the two species consistently described with dark skin, are categorised as 'evil races' and players are encouraged to choose from the 'evil' column when making characters of these races. Races also come with intrinsic stat blocks: each species is categorised as a more traditionally Intelligent or Athletic race. As The Main Event argues, it is 'inescapable that race in D&D exists to justify the annihilation and pillaging from *lesser* beings', where good, light-skinned humanoids commit acts of violence against non-Common (English) speaking, dark-skinned, animalistic races.

Figure 2 An alignment chart for Lord of the Rings. Aragorn Lawful Good. Gandalf Neutral Good. Bilbo Chaotic good. Mandos Lawful Neutral. Ent True Neutral. Gollum Chaotic Neutral. Sauron Lawful Evil. Smaug Neutral Evil. Morgoth Chaotic Evil.

D&D is, of course, a highly specific medium with flaws inherent to it: the hyper-specificity of game components like racial stat blocks and top-down battle simulation, as well as its interlaced history with Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson's direct inspirations and links to Tolkien, H.P. Lovecraft, Robert E. Howard and other white, English and American twentieth-century male writers (Maliszewski "Inspiration and Emulation"). But in its seemingly contained specificity we can see a microcosm, a relatively recent example of the world's institutional problems condensed and mapped onto tangible components (Knode). By popularising terms like 'stat blocks' and 'alignment charts', games like D&D have updated the vocabulary found within criminal anthropological pseudosciences like phrenology and physiognomy. As Knode and The Main Event point out, despite the generally-held belief that phrenology is not just inaccurate but a tool that has historically been used to do great harm, *D&D* is just one game system in a canon of literature that makes physical anthropology palatable to an audience by dressing it as a fantasy-world truism. While I do not believe that games (whether they are video, tabletop or roleplaying) are brainwashing children into becoming violent racists (Palaus et al.), it is the un-acknowledged consumption of the ideology that allows players to dismiss real-world racism with statements like "it's just a game" or "it's not that serious". For many Black people like Tanya Compass, this dismissal is so fraught because as she states, she has had these tropes used against her in racial hate-crimes. In one such incident, a stranger 'using my own photo [asked] how I like their orc' character (@cypheroftyr). This stranger collapsed anti-Black and anti-Orc imagery into one loaded comment in an attempt to align Compass's Black body with hateful stereotypes of the orc as unintelligent, violent and ugly, using game mechanics to maliciously 'disguise' their racism in the language of humour.

We can paratextually orient the characters of *LM* by creating our own alignment chart based on Hugo's most commonly used character traits in *LM*: physiognomy, class and goodness where Hugo creates distinctions between [Ugly, Evil and Poor] and [Good, Beautiful, Rich] characters. Yee argues that the 'colonial comedy' of French nineteenth-century literature occurs in the margins (2016, 15). This chapter brings these moments of imperialist and colonial thought into direct focus, addressing the appropriation of the language of slavery as used to gain empathy for the white body, the 'monstrosity' of the non-French body as demonstrated by who is referred to as savage, beastly and dark, and the emergence of racial taxonomy as a way to profile potential criminals. Ferguson argues that it is critical to embark on critique through the intervention of a queer of colour analysis because by 'racist practice articulates itself generally as gender and sexual regulation' (Ferguson 3). In doing so we understand how Hugo's characters 'bear the wounds of [colonial] histories' (Prasad 14). It is easy to create alignment charts of Hugo's characters because of Hugo's constant use of physiognomy, especially when concerning his criminal characters. With this acknowledgment, we can begin to categorise *LM* characters and to unpick the associations given to them based in racialised and gendered language.

EVIL, UGLY, POOR

As the primary antagonists of the novel, Monsieur and Madame Thénardier are the epitome of the worst on each scale: they are Evil, Ugly, and Poor. Their behaviour is constantly 'monstrous' (I,4,i,124; II,3,viii,344; II,3,x,353; III,8,iv,608; III,8,xix,646; III,8,xx,651; 654; V,9,iv,1185), their physiognomy is 'foul' and 'shifty' (I,4,ii,130), they are in debt and they are proud enough to think highly of themselves. They believe any wrongs are the fault of others (II,3,ii,317), and as Hugo says: they exemplify 'a social deformity perhaps even more awful

than the evil rich: the evil poor' (IV,2,i,706). As Grant notes with some cynicism, they 'are beyond any salvation apparently' (Grant 162). Class and race are intrinsic to the characterisation of the Thénardiers, to the point where the Evil Poor are indelibly linked with the racist iconography of the 'savage' (III,8,xviii,645; III,8,xx,664; IV,6,ii,780; 790; IV,8,iv,838; V,6,i,1118; V,9,iv,1176), the 'barbarian' (II,3,ii,318), the 'beast' and animals like oxes, monkeys and runts (I,4,i,124; I,4,i,127; I,4,ii,130; II,3,ii,316; 317; II,3,viii,340; III,8,vi,615; III,8,xii,630; III,8,xix,646; III,8,xx,653; 657; V,3,iii,1052; V,9,iv,1178), and the 'mongrel' (I,4,ii,130; II,3,ii,316). Hugo also ties the Thénardier family to real Native American peoples like the 'Iowas' [Báxoje], the South American 'Botocudo' [Aimoré] (IV,6,ii,780) and with Indigenous Panamanians (V,9,iv,1176).

John Locke's 1690 *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* used 'hierarchies of colonialism to delineate' who was fit to receive education. Locke named '*Children, Ideots, Savages,* and the grossly *Illiterate*' as equivalents because the 'absence of culture or the capacity to engage with it, [meant that] the primitive mind lacked abstract ideas and reverberated only the body's most fundamental occupations' (Schuller 44-5). Throughout his Evil, Ugly and Poor characters, Hugo has interspersed references to Indigenous peoples, Black people and poor white people. Poor white people have a perceived lack of, or absence of, culture because of their financial status, and so Hugo is semi-supportive of their rights to education. Used in comparison to educated/civilised white counterparts, Black and Indigenous people are used in *LM* to describe an *incapacity* to engage with 'high-brow' French culture because of the physiognomic barrier that prevents them: the argument being that people with low brow ridges cannot physically understand so-called 'high-brow' culture. As Schuller states, when they were denied 'the status of fellow subjects of the nineteenth-century, racialized peoples were understood to be animated fossils of the

evolutionary past' (Schuller 57), and thus it was perceived as being just to advocate for their cultural and/or literal extermination. Hugo, like Locke, links 'children', 'idiots', 'savages' and the illiterate together in his presentation of those who would be Evil, and thus there is a racial element to his categorisations. Even white French poor people must be categorised with the language used for Black and Indigenous people in order to prove that simple proximity to non-white existence warps intelligence and Goodness.

THE SAVAGE CANNIBAL

The link between race and class is built when we are first introduced to the Thénardiers. We are told of a cart that lies outside their inn, from which a huge chain hangs:

> This chain made you think, not of the beams it was meant to haul, but of the mastodons and mammoths it could have harnessed; there was the whiff of the lockup about it, but of some colossal, superhuman lockup, and it looked as if it had yanked away some monster. Homer would have tied up Polyphemus with it, Shakespeare, Caliban (I,4,i,123-4).

This cart belongs to the Thénardiers and as such becomes part of their ability to hold their prisoners: a show of their might as slavers, able to indenture even monsters. Yet the family uses the cart as a plaything, a swing for Éponine and Azelma as children. The cart, rather than a show of might and ownership, is a symbol of the chains that bind the family to poverty. Placed next to Monsieur Thénardier's hand-painted inn sign, the cart is his own self-image: a heavy, self-imposed burden that restricts any of the Thénardier family from growing, from developing away from being evil, poor and monstrous.

Both literary figures are caricatures of the stranger: sympathetic to some extent, but

ultimately xenophobic portrayals of the 'other'. As Kermode argues, 'Caliban's name is usually regarded as a development of some form of the word "Carib", meaning a savage inhabitant of the New world; "cannibal" derives from this, and "Caliban" is possibly a simple anagram of that word' (Shakespeare xxxviii).[6] van Schoor uses the term 'Calibanised' to describe how the inhabitants of Southern African shores were conceptualised in Luís Vaz de Camões' Portuguese epic *The Lusíads*, first published in 1572. Camões describes the 'stranger with a black skin' as being 'wilder than Polyphemus' (Camões 1997: V.27;28 qtd. in van Schoor 218), mythologising these people as being part of the monstrous in opposition to his European heroic voyage. With this understanding of how early, xenophobic metaphor builds a then-persistent caricature in the mind of the reader, Hilb argues that *The Tempest* cleared the way for colonialism and slavery in the Americas by establishing racial discourse that was then used to (and continues to) 'divest Black persons of justice, freedom, and life' (Hilb 144-5). The association between the Thénardiers and the two 'monsters' thus sets us up to understand that the Thénardier family are Others, and while still introducing them divests them of their humanity.

At the same time, while Thénardier is aligned with the monstrous Other, he is still more human and more French than the cannibal savage stereotype of America, a non-human beast to dominate. van Schoor argues that metaphors of Caliban and Polyphemus when used to describe the inhabitants of both South Africa and South America (including members of the Tupinambà tribe) are conceptualised by their relation to food: to be civilised is to be awed by the European mode of consumption, to be a cannibal savage is to be 'uncomprehending, undiscerning and thus lacking in any faculties to qualify him as a

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[6] van Schoor notes that there are also 'alternative derivations: from a Romany word for 'blackness'; and from the Chalybes, savage cannibals mentioned twice by Vergil, whom Pliny located near the Coraxi' (#16 227).

participant in that global network of consumption and exchange' (van Schoor 219).

Grossman also refers to the 'primitive appetites' of the villains of the novel, including the

'vicious mongrel Thénardier [who] embodies this relentless hunger' (Grossman 1994, 16). In

his final scene in the novel, Thénardier explains to Marius that he wishes to escape to

America to find his freedom, aiming for La Joya because 'the region's dangerous; it's full of

cannibals. […] The old world has given me an appetite. I'd like to try savages' (V,9,iv,1176).[7]

As Garcia states in an attempt to complicate the stereotype of anthropophagous cultures of

some American Indian tribes, the Tupinambá are founded around the idea of 'a true

incorporation of the world-view of the ingested enemy' (Viveiros de Castro, 2002, 229–25

qtd. In Garcia), at odds with the mentalities of both Hugo and Thénardier who see

cannibalism as a purely violent, destructive act by bestial creatures lacking in the ability to

partake in civil consumption. The colonial eye written by Hugo regurgitates a false depiction

of Indigenous cultures and forms a solid link between a monstrous Thénardier and savage

Native peoples, while still maintaining the dominance and civility of the white Frenchman

whose appetite is legitimised by his being funded by the bourgeois Marius. Thénardier may

be travelling to be among the cannibals, but his voyage is that of a European with an

understanding of commercial trade. He is a savvy participant, buying his way into trade, not

an uncomprehending savage, by virtue of his continent of origin, and this separates him at

birth from being a true Caliban or Polyphemus.

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[7] Rose loads this translation with a doubling of meaning between anthropophagy and 'try' that isn't as evident in the original ['c'est que ce pays est dangereux; il est plein d'anthropophages. […] La vieille civilisation m'a mis sur les dents. Je veux essayer des sauvages' (LM 1235)], though in a previous chapter, Thénardier does ask: "who are we going to eat?", which Hugo tells us 'signifies at once to kill, to murder, and to rob. *To eat*, real meaning: *to devour.*' (IV,6,iii,803) ['« qui allons-nous manger ? » […] qui signifie tout à la fois tuer, assassiner et dévaliser. *Manger,* sens vrai : *dévorer*' (LM850) (emphasis Hugo's)].

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While Madame Thénardier is blamed for her abuse of Cosette, her cruelty is linked with her appearance and gender in a way her husband is not. Her ability is often linked to her lack of what Hugo believes should be instinctual: maternal instinct. The only positive description ascribed to her is a 'rather touching' expression 'both animal and angelic, that is particular to motherhood' (I,4,i,124) as she watches over her daughters, but when her link with her motherhood fades, she is nothing but 'a monster' (II,3,viii,344). While she cares for her two daughters, her three sons suffer without her love (II,3,i,315; III,1,xiii,491) and are eventually sold off or sent out into the streets. Unlike Fantine, who sacrifices all for her motherhood, Thénardier is 'a mother only because she was a mammal' (II,3,ii,318) and this lack of love for her children is the epitome of her evil nature.

Madame Thénardier's lack of traditionally feminine traits is much of the cause of her being Evil: she is a 'redhead, fleshy, yet bony' and 'a nasty fat witch' (I,4,ii,131). Not only is Madame Thénardier deemed physically and mentally ugly in comparison to the ideal women that Fantine and Cosette are by virtue of their being petite or pale, she is also stripped of cisgender, Eurocentric concepts of womanhood:

> She had a bit of a beard. She was the ideal butcher's boy dressed up as a girl. [...] if it hadn't been for the novels she had read, which, at times, bizarrely brought out the snooty little prude beneath the ogress, the idea of calling her a woman would never have occurred to anyone (II,3,ii,316).

As Lewis observes, a female character in Hugo 'may be a model of a feminine ideal that is by definition a passive, objectified non-subject' like Fantine and Cosette (I,3,ii,104; V,5,vi,1101), or 'a creature so profoundly denatured as to no longer be feminine' (Lewis 2016, 66) like

Madame Thénardier who is 'tall, blond, ruddy, barrel-like, brawny, boxy, huge, and agile' (II,3,ii,316), 'mannish, yet simpering', a 'colossus fit for the fairground freak show' (I,4,i,127). As William Alcott spelled out in his 1855 *The Young Woman's Book of Health*, 'extreme or "gross corpulence slides into an association with primitive Africans. […] Stoutness, corpulence, and the surplusage of flesh" are never desirable "except among African savages"' (qtd. in Strings 4). This policing of femininity as a barrier of entry into who is considered a woman is still having an effect not only on transgender women but on cisgender women and intersex people of colour like Caster Semenya and Dutee Chand, whose 'hyperandrogenism' (where natural testosterone levels are elevated above a particular point), or Santhi Soundarajan's Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome have prevented them from participating in female sports events, despite being assigned female at birth. By creating a rigid portrayal of white femininity and defining these as the 'biological norm' within healthcare systems, beauty standards and in our concepts of who or what is *human*, women like Madame Thénardier become 'monstrous', because they fail to adhere to what this white, cisgender author deems 'typical' of a woman. Working class Black women in particular are perceived as '*souillée* or soiled' because of their stereotypical proximity to 'excessive sexuality, and darkness with dirt' (Yee 2016, 146). This depiction as 'mannish' and as a beast becomes more pernicious when, as Schuller states, Black women 'were most frequently identified as the eternal remainders of the animal past lurking within the human race, so primitive that they lacked the capacity of sensory self-management and were mentally indistinguishable from black men' (Schuller 69). When Hugo states that both Thénardiers are 'in the highest degree capable of the kind of odious progress that aims for evil' (I,4,ii,130), the equality between both Madame and Monsieur Thénardier is one we must see not just through feminist concepts of equality, but also because of the pair's

racialisation: they are seen to be equals because they are both comparable to 'beasts' and, thus not white enough to enjoy the privilege of binary concepts of gender.

Like Semenya and Saartiji Baartman before her, Madame Thénardier's body undergoes immense public scrutiny (Batelaan and Abdel-Shehid 150), where our understanding of her gender comes from the men who attempt to reconcile their concept of femininity with the 'monster' they see. This public display of and fascination with her body as a 'fairground' spectacle is fundamentally different to Fantine and Cosette who, while also subject to male scrutiny, are not forced to undergo the same forms of humiliation or violence. When referring to Cosette's bedroom, Hugo's narrator tells us that is unfitting for a reader to impinge on her space because:

> It is the inside of a flower not yet opened, it is a whiteness glowing in the shade, it is the intimate cell of a closed lily, which should remain unseen by any man as long as it has not yet been seen by the sun. A budding woman is sacred (V,1,x,988).

While Hugo is ultimately lying and does, in fact, take the voyeur reader into Cosette's bedroom, the language used for the young woman protected by physical and metaphorical whiteness is not the same kind of invasive and mocking language that Madame Thénardier is subjected to.

BLACKNESS AS CRIMINALITY

Hugo's anti-Black double-standard is most prominently displayed in reference to the Thénardiers and those who associate with them. The last we see of Monsieur Thénardier is his travelling to the United States with his remaining living family member, Azelma, to become a slave trader. This is the final abominable thing Thénardier can do with the money

he has extorted from Marius (who has taken it from Cosette's dowry given by Valjean) – the product of Valjean's life of goodness and Marius's survival of the barricade on which he fought for France's freedom, recycled back into the continued enslavement of Black people. By giving Thénardier this slaver ending, Hugo signals that Thénardier is *Evil*, as this matches with Hugo's pro-abolition standing. Yet despite this messaging, Thénardier and his acolytes' criminality is consistently related to Blackness. There are three explicit references to Black characters in the novel: Homère Hugu (a member of the Patron Minette, Thénardier's gang (III,7,iv,598)), an unnamed man in the chain gang that terrifies Cosette and who 'had once, perhaps, been a slave and could compare chains' (IV,3,viii,747), and an unnamed man who is the Devil in disguise tricking villagers into death, the analogy sandwiched between moments describing the Thénadiers (II,2,ii,304). Each man is linked with criminality and terror, in turn associating these traits with Blackness.

Grossman argues that Hugo 'includes himself under the alias' of Homére Hugu, which Yee states is 'perhaps the first instance of French literature' in which the author identifies profoundly with a Black man (Yee 2008, 59). Quoting Maurel, who noted that *Bug-Jargal*'s Habibrah is Arabic for inkpot, Grossman states that Hugo's aim is to explode 'institutionalized wrongdoing from within by pushing "blackness" to its limit' (*Ibid*.) and that a 'part of' Hugo 'is, and always has been, the imp in the inkpot' (1994, 25). Though Grossman links the author Hugo with the 'inkstand' Hugu and considers thematic blackness on the same page as mentioning Homère, she does not unpick the use of a Black man as a stereotype (1994, 287). Robb also notes that Homére 'owns the emblematic "ug"', like the hero Bug-Jargal, and that the latter has 'the face of a Black Hugo' (1998, 123). Comparing descriptions of Bug-Jargal with anthropologist Havelock Ellis' physiognomic assessment of Hugo's bust, Robb notes the similarities between the two, including quotations of a 'large

forehead […] surprising in a Negro' and indicative of a brain 'above average in size' for Hugo,

as well as shared large lips and nostrils 'disdainful' in Bug-Jargal, though which gave him

'such a proud and powerful air' (Robb 1998, 123-4). Robb argues that this dualling of Hugo

with 'social, political and racial outcasts made it possible to feel compassion for the outcast

in himself' (124). Cox agrees, noting that not only does this gesture allow Hugo to 'identify

with the father of the Western tradition' in the Homeric allusion, it also 'reveals an urge to

wrest authoritative literature away from being the exclusive preserve of educated, white,

male readers' (98). Cox does not further this argument here, but this optimistic reading sees

Hugo creating a Black Homer as a positive act of anti-racism. What this reading does

however ignore is that although Homère Hugu only appears fleetingly, he operates as a

black, criminal Hugo, one of those 'deformed toadstools that grow underneath civilization'

(III,7,iv,598), the Black grotesque 'beauty spot' to heighten the white Hugo's sublime (Porter

51). While, as Yee argues, Blackness can be capable of including both the sublime and the

grotesque as in *Bug-Jargal* (Yee 2008, 59), in *LM* there is no explicit Black character within

the category of the former, only the latter. Therefore, when Hugo wages war on his

'deformed', Black self, telling us that what is required to 'dissolve these ghouls' is 'Light.

Floods of light. No bat can brave the dawn. Light up the dregs of society' (599), he is casting

bright whiteness on his alter-ego, banishing the self-critical anxiety of his own image onto

the evil, fictional, black/Black grotesque, thus achieving the status of the sublime by proxy:

closer not to the 'imp in the inkpot' but to Homer.

　　　While not explicitly named as Black, Boulatruelle, an alleged ex-convict who works in

Montfermeil as a road-liner, can be read either as a Black man experiencing ostracization

and bigotry because of his race or as a white man encumbered with his link to Blackness.

Through a series of misunderstandings, Boulatruelle comes to be associated with the local

legend of a 'black man' ['un homme noir' (LM 334)] who is really the Devil in disguise (II,2,ii,303) tricking villagers with cursed treasure in the nearby forest. Local women who pass Boulatruelle 'took him for Beelzebub', crossing themselves when they think of him. Besides the definitive anti-Blackness in repeatedly stating that the Devil is a Black man, the villagers' adamance that Boulatruelle is associated with the Devil is a form of racism in itself. Boulatruelle is described as being 'too respectful, too humble, too quick to doff his cap at everyone, quivering and smiling in front of the gendarmes', and for this the village 'looked down on him', linking this servitude with his being affiliated with a 'gang of bandits' (II,2,ii,303). When what should be positive characteristics are regarded as being suspicious, the reader is encouraged to ask what unseen factor the villagers can see that the reader cannot, and the Devil's being Black is at the forefront of their associations of visual traits that connote hidden evil.

Boulatruelle's status as a potential ex-convict is a subject of speculation. The title is given to him because the townspeople notice that he is 'subject to occasional police surveillance' and because he cannot find employment. The 'nothing to hide' fallacy is a common excuse given by those attempting to disguise their anti-Blackness to this day, often accompanied by the wilfully obtuse assertion that to obey the law is to avoid being harassed by the police. This is demonstrated by the UK's CCTV slogan: 'If you've got nothing to hide, you've got nothing to fear', which weaponizes guilt and fear to infringe on privacy rights (Solove). As Akala argues, nothing-to-hide policing is not about reducing crime but about:

the conditioning of expectations, about getting black people used to the fact that they are not real and full citizens, so they should learn to not expect the privileges that would usually accrue from such a status (Akala 178).

Simone Browne also argues that surveillance is not just a tool of racial discrimination but one of construction, arguing that consistent 'enactments of surveillance reify boundaries along racial lines, thereby reifying race' (Browne 8). We see this as the local women of Hugo's novel are 'scarcely more reassured' when they recognise Boulatruelle for himself than when they mistake him for the Devil. The literal demonisation of Black men takes place in their surveillance of him, and under their watch, the transfer of Blackness from the Devil to Boulatruelle becomes true because they make it the Truth. Because the townspeople feed one another with the legend of the Devil in the woods, their perception of fiction warps their reality, the cautionary tale of the myth warning them not to trust Black people; not just in the forest but in the town, and presumably in the rest of their lives. Boulatruelle is thus treated with suspicion, threatened with torture and ostracised from Montfermeil society, the townsfolk heeding the warning of the legend (II,2,ii,306). Thénardier can then benefit from this anti-Blackness, able to ply Boulatruelle with fake friendship within the context of an unfriendly town to extract information he needs. Hugo does not criticise this behaviour, and in fact rewards the townspeople's suspicion: their allegations that Boulatruelle must be criminal because of his aversion to surveillance is proven right by Boulatruelle's convict-to-convict familiarity with Valjean. While it could be argued that the reader is encouraged to critique the prejudices towards Boulatruelle rather than to believe that the villagers have some intrinsic moral insight, especially as Valjean is also a person who has been incarcerated and is our sympathetic protagonist, by confirming that Boulatruelle has a criminal past, Hugo perpetuates the idea that the suspicion of the Black man as criminal is warranted, and the reader is allowed to continue construct anti-Black suspicion into their own lives. Within the wider construction of Blackness within the novel, the uncriticised in-fiction white supremacist bigotry that aligns Black male with criminal

becomes a truth, and Boulatruelle (unlike Valjean) is not allowed to escape this narrative within the novel.

BLACKNESS AS CORRUPTION

This anti-Blackness is furthered as the Thénardiers' associates are linked with a kind of corruption in the form of Blackness. One member of the Patron Minette, Gueulemer, is described as being 'thought to be a Creole' (III,7,iii,595) ['On le croyait créole' (LM 635)]. Rose notes that here the term implies 'a European born in the tropics' ("Notes" 1283 #2) rather than his being a mixed-race man with a Black parent. Pierre Larousse defines 'créole' in his 1869 edition of *Grand Dictionnaire Universel Du XIXe siècle* :

> On donne généralement le nom de créole à un individu de race blanche qui est né sur le continent américain ou dans les Antilles; mais ce mot désigne plus particulièrement les personnes qui, descendant d'une race blanche, sont nées sous les tropiques.
>
> [The name Creole is generally given to a white individual who was born on the American continent or in the West Indies; but this word designates more particularly people who, being descendants of a white race, were born in the tropics] (Larousse "CRÉOLE" 490).

Further into his definition Larousse does specify that there are Black people who are also considered créole:

> Les nègres qui naissent dans les colonies montrent des qualités physiques et morales presque égales à celles des blancs créoles et supérieures a celles des Africains. [...]

Dans les pays où ils sont libres, à Haïti surtout, la seule différence qui existe entre

eux et les créoles blancs consiste à peu près dans la couleur de la peau et dans la

forme de la chevelure.

[Negroes born in the colonies show physical and moral qualities almost equal to

those of white Creoles and superior to those of Africans. […] In the countries where

they are free, especially in Haiti, the only difference that exists between them and

the white Creoles consists more or less in the colour of the skin and the shape of the

hair] (Larousse "CRÉOLE" 490).

Hugo does not specify whether Gueulemer is a *blanc créole* or whether he has Black

ancestry. Even so, there is an association being made with his being born else-where (here

in a notably Black area), and his proximity to nineteenth-century views of Blackness in

regard to 'physical' and 'moral' qualities.

Gueulemer was 'six feet tall, had pectorals of marble, biceps of bronze, cavernous

lungs, the torso of a colossus,' with 'wiry short hair', and is compared to a 'lowlife' version of

the Farnese Hercules. Hugo tells us that while he could have 'broken monsters; he had

found it easier to become one' (III,7,iii,595). Glenn argues that Levaillant's 1790 *Voyage*

dans l'Intérieur had a marked impact on how a Black South African body was described in

white European works, where 'classical imagery was not merely literary habit, or hyperbole,

but was so well established as no longer to be a question of likeness but of identity' (Glenn

41). Glenn catalogues these comparisons, including three comparisons of Black men with a

statue of Hercules. In John Barrow's 1806 *Travels into the interior of southern Africa*, a

Xhosa man is described as 'a perfect Hercules; and a cast from his body would not have

disgraced the pedestal in the Farnese palace' (qtd. in Glenn 40), in *Makanna; or, the Land of*

the Savage, a character describes a Xhosa warrior: 'he puts me in mind of the Major's bronze statue of Hercules' (Anonymous 1834: III. 46, qtd. in Glenn 40), and Forester describes a Clu Clu man in *Everard Tunstall*: the 'general effect of his appearance would be best represented by that of a statue of Hercules moulded in bronze' (Forester 1851: II. 37, qtd. in Glenn 42). In a similar analysis of the frontispiece of Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality* (in which a Khoi man rejects his European upbringing to return to his relatives), Schneider suggests that 'the artist has taken elements of classical visual depictions of Hercules at the crossroads to give nobility and power to the man's decision and decisive actions' (qtd. in Glenn 28). Hugo also uses a comparison to Hercules in his description of Bug-Jargal, the eponymous hero of his 1826 novel about an enslaved Haitian man: 'the beauty of his form, still possessed of what one might call Herculean proportions, for all that it had been worn away and damaged by the strain of daily toil' (*Bug-Jargal* 80). These description are similar to a 1797 profile of mixed-race Black French general Thomas-Alexandre Dumas, who was described as having 'frizzy hair [that] recalls the curls of the Greeks and Romans' (qtd in Reiss 71).[8] Biographer Tom Reiss specifies that Dumas' 'non-European features were not taken as signs of primitive inferiority — as they would be in nearly every time and place over the next two hundred years' (71), highlighting how rare a positive comparison was between Black features like tight, coiled hair and the neoclassical ideal form despite the similarities in texture. Indeed, while Hugo compares Gueulemer to Hercules, Gueulemer is a monstrous and low-life version and the similarities between Black masculinity and the idealism of Ancient Greece not made as compliments but as corruptions. Glenn states that what had been a purposefully and politically motivated

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[8] Reiss cites the following source for the quote: Author Unknown, "Le general Dumas, homme de couleur," n.d. [1797], Bibliothèque nationale de France, NAF 24641.

positive allusion to the Greco-Roman Classical form in South Africa 'lost currency […] with the increasing prestige of scientific notions', where a 'crude social Darwinism' was employed to legitimise a 'settler culture determined to impose its own values and uses on the indigenous population' (Glenn 45-6). This turned the tide on visual allegory, where value shifted from the 'noble savage' to a population ripe for exploitation. Though Hugo creates similarities between the ideal form of Hercules and Gueulemer, he also deploys social Darwinism through racial physiognomy, and suggests that if Gueulemer had not been born a Creole but had been born and bred in France surrounded by whiteness, he might have found it easier to complete his journey into a *purer* heroism instead.

Despite not naming Gueulemer as Black, the character is given the so-called characteristics of racist physiognomic 'Blackness' to further the idea that to even have proximity to non-white features *causes* criminality. Gueulemer has the 'skull of a bird', is both 'stupid' and 'lazy' and he has a 'low forehead' and 'broad temples' (III,7,iii,595). Racial physiognomy claimed that Black people had low foreheads because of a perceived lack of intelligence and humanity. As Samuel Wells wrote in 1875 beside a caricature of a Black man: 'the recession of the forehead […] betokens animality, and […] a low grade of intelligence' (125). As Saini argues, by creating these fictionalised categories of physiognomic race:

> Race, rather than history, could then be framed as the explanation for […] the failure of all non-white races to live up to the European ideal that Europeans had themselves defined (26).

Even with debatable ancestry, Gueulemer joins Boulatruelle in a race of Hugo-created semi-Blackness, to which his lack of intelligence and inherent criminal leanings can be assigned. This is set up for us in the paragraph before Gueulemer is introduced:

> All men are made of the same clay. […] The same darkness before, the same flesh during, the same ashes after. But when ignorance is mixed with human dough, it blackens it. This incurable blackness takes over man's insides and there turns into Evil (III,7,ii,595).

While not necessarily referring to Blackness in terms of race in this passage, these associations do have the effect of furthering racial prejudice. By constantly creating and recreating links between Blackness and blackness, ignorance and evil, Hugo confirms racial physiognomists' assertion that Black people are biologically less intelligent than white Europeans like himself.

MONTPARNASSE

Another member of the gang, Montparnasse, also joins this group in semi-Blackness. During their chance meeting, Valjean takes the opportunity to attempt to dissuade Montparnasse from continuing as a criminal. In this speech Valjean states: 'Tu ne veux pas être ouvrier, tu seras esclave. [...] tu ne veux pas être son ami, tu seras son nègre' (LM 800). Rose translates this as: 'You don't want to be a working man, you will be a slave. [...] you don't want to be its friend, you will be its navvy' (IV,4,ii,756). Rose uses the word 'navvy' (an unskilled labourer) and Christine Donougher 'serf' as translations of Hugo's more explicit 'négre', which reduces the link between Blackness and Montparnasse in the translation. Larousse's 1874 edition of his dictionary contains multiple definitions of the word 'nègre', including a

three-thousand-word anthropological essay on Black people. The first definition is the most

simple: 'Qui appartient à la race noire : Espèce NÈGRE.' [*Belongs to the black race: The*

NEGRO species] ("NÈGRE" 903). Prasad states that the word 'is one that organizes a group of

human bodies by assigning a single racial identity to persons who are in fact of diverse

ethnic, cultural, and linguistic origins in Africa', and that this racial meaning does not end

with this social organization but that the Romantic novel played a role in 'adding a new

socially constructed meaning to the term' (17). Larousse does go on to include several other

uses of the term:

> — Personne condamnée à un état de misère et d'assujettissement. Les pauvres sont
>
> les NÈGRES de l'Europe. [*A person condemned to a state of misery and subjugation.*
>
> *The poor are the negroes of Europe.*]

> — Traiter quelqu'un comme un nègres, Le traiter avec beaucoup de dureté et de
>
> mépris: Les envoyés de Saint-Domingue se plaignaient [...] «ne voyez vous pas bien
>
> qu'ils me traitent moi-même comme un NÈGRE? » [*To treat someone like a negro, to*
>
> *treat him with a lot of harshness and contempt: The envoys of Saint-Domingue*
>
> *complained [...] "don't you see that they are treating me like a NEGRO?"*] ("NÈGRE"
>
> 903).

These two definitions indicate a move from the use of 'nègre' to describe only Black people

towards its use as an indication of subjugation without necessarily implying race. This use is

perhaps the impetus behind both Rose and Donougher's non-racialised translations of

'navvy' and 'serf', shifting concentration away from the racial aspect to pinpoint only the

inequity of workload. Françoise Vergès does however challenge this in her analysis and

criticism of Larousse's dictionary definitions and the progress of vocabulary used towards Black people in French from the nineteenth century to the present. Vergès states:

> That the term "negro" has been associated with a history of dehumanization and enslavement goes without saying [...] This history, often encapsulated in the word "negro", is with us, from now on, part of our common past, part of our reality (Vergès 26-7).

Here Vergès indicates how important it is to consider our language use, especially in these terms used in the nineteenth century. I therefore question why both translators opted towards a non-racialised definition of the term. Perhaps they both interpreted that Hugo intended to focus solely on the worker's inequality and/or job role. However, if this was the case, Hugo had other similarly neutral words at his disposal, such as 'serviteur' or 'ouvrier', which would not carry the same racial overtones.

Language is 'a living organism' which 'continues to evolve and presupposes differences and conflicts in meaning' (Masters-Wicks 83). I do not believe that there is only one 'correct' translation of this phrasing but observe that in obscuring the arguable integrity of Blackness within the term, not only is whiteness centred in a new narrative of enslavement, but Black people are also removed from the record in their entirety. In using the words 'navvy' and 'serf', the reality of the novel is shifted by the translators to disguise the *ubiquity* of the racism of the period, ultimately silencing Hugo's own word choices. As appropriative as the term 'nègre' comes to be when used to describe the poor white people of Paris, the term still comes attached to the racial history that was its precursor: that even to be *compared* to a Black person in the period was shorthand for misery, subjugation, harsh treatment and contempt. The second quoted use in Larousse may refer to a white

worker misappropriating the suffering of Black people, but in their use of the word, we can still hear the echoes of historic reality and therefore understand that this worker was keenly aware that Black and non-Black workers were treated differently because of their race. By not acknowledging the specifically anti-Black history behind the progression of the word 'nègre', the translators work to redact this racial history from the mind of the reader. I point this out to memorialize how interwoven Blackness is within the novel, even in passages without named Black characters.

Montparnasse is not described as being white, unlike the other pretty young men he is of age with. Enjolras, with his 'long blond eyelashes', 'blue eyes' (III,4,i,536), 'lion's mane […] halo' of hair (V,1,v,976) and 'marble cheek' (V,1,viii,985) embodies Aryan-standards of the hypothetical ethnic type 'Caucasian'. The visual descriptors of Montparnasse tell us he has 'lips like cherries, lustrous black hair' that is 'crimped and pomaded' (III,7,iii,596), that he has 'curly locks' (IV,4,ii,758) and that his eyes have 'the brightness of spring' in them (596). Valjean's statement to Montparnasse that: 'you will be a slave. […] you will be its negro' (IV,4,ii)[9] may therefore not be solely metaphorical. Montparnasse will not only be treated *like* a slave, but he will become an enslaved person of African heritage. While it is again problematic that another criminal is associated with Blackness, it is a reading in which Montparnasse can exist within the narrative as a beautiful young man without being racialised *until* he is in proximity to the racist police institution. Valjean attempts to deter Montparnasse from committing further crime because he is, on some level, aware that the treatment of Black people within the prison system is worse than that of white galley slaves like himself, which could show racial solidarity not seen elsewhere within the text.

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[9] Translation mine.

PATRON MINETTE AND BLACKFACE

This association between a proximity to Blackness and criminality is furthered when the

Patron Minette arrive at Thénardier's room in blackface (III,8,xix,647-8). As they enter to

extort their hostage, Valjean, their shocking black faces are noteworthy:

> These men, with their masks or with the black slime covering their faces and turning
>
> them into colliers, negroes, or fiends, whatever you feared most (III,8,xx,662)

This reference to colliers might be because of the political space coal workers (from miners

to merchants) occupied in the period. A crew-style system of payment created 'a strong

sense of solidarity among the mining crews, whose members looked to the chief miner

rather than the company for their livelihood' (Holter 24-5). This system, with a distinctly

hierarchical order that created utmost dependency on the miners to trust the hewer's

ability to locate and quarry the best pay-outs (Holter 25), was described as being similar to

that of a 'gang' (Guillaume qtd. in Zeldin 221), and so it is perhaps unsurprising that Hugo

might associate these very insular communities with those that are intended to evoke fear.

However, while some readers of Hugo might fear a collier because of perceptions of insular,

working-class labour groups, I assert this conflation of 'colliers' with 'fiends' and 'negroes' is

mostly because of the physical association with having dark skin, manufactured or natural.

Thénardier is quick to explain away the blackface: they are his coal miner friends, they work

in chemical factories, yet the meaning is implicit: Blackness is criminal, Blackness is

frightening, Blackness is unknown and dangerous.

Physical Blackness in the form of Black men or those imitating them is portrayed as a

threat to a character's mortality. Black people like Homère Hugu, Boulatruelle and the

nameless other Black criminals become part of the toy box Hugo draws his 'Harlequins' and 'Cassandras' from (V,6,I,1118). Just as the archetypical *Commedia dell'arte* servant and the classical prophet bring associations with their names, Hugo enfolds the identity of 'Black Male' with the characteristics 'criminal', 'violent', and 'Evil' with the intent that these associations will cause the reader fear simply by evoking Blackness. Because the Patron Minette are a 'malevolent brotherhood', part of the collective characters that Llosa argues can be read a singular unit (86), their individual Black, violent masculinity becomes a collective feature of all. As Audre Lorde and James Baldwin discuss:

> **AL:** I wept and I cried and I fought and I stormed, but I just knew it. I was Black. I was female. […] Nobody was dreaming about me. Nobody was even studying me except as something to wipe out.
>
> **JB:** You are saying you do not exist in the American dream except as a nightmare.
>
> **AL:** That's right.

Despite the century of time and geographic location between Hugo's 'fiends' and Lorde and Baldwin's conceptualisation of being Black as being seen as 'nightmares', conceptions of Blackness as demonic remain pervasive because of the literary associations created in language use such as Hugo's.

THE MONGREL

Rose translates Hugo's words to 'mongrel' twice: 'Ce gredin de l'ordre composite' (LM 348) [Rose: 'This mongrel of very mixed blood' (II,3,ii,316)] and 'Ces êtres appartrnaient à cette classe bâtarde' (LM 157) [Rose: 'These creatures belonged to that mongrel class' (I,4,ii,130).

In English, 'mongrel' is a slur often used for mixed-race peoples (RSDB "mongrel"), but Hugo employs less racialised language than his translator. By using 'mongrel' here as a translation for both 'bâtarde' and 'gredin de l'ordre composite', Rose adds a focus on racial blood heritage that is not evident in the Hugo. In the line 'Thénardier appartenait à cette variété de cantiniers maraudeurs' (LM 349) [Rose: 'Thénardier belonged to that species of marauding camp followers' (II,3,ii,317)], there is an emphasis on nineteenth-century naturalist-esque vocabulary with its focus on distinct species (variété), which goes some way to explaining why Rose might imbue her translation with racial science terminology not apparent in the original text, especially with Hugo's own focus on physiognomy and natural history terminology in describing his characters (Quandt 35). As discussed in the introduction, translators are not objective beings, and they can transfer their biases onto the text. It is important to question why Rose has chosen to use a derogatory term used for mixed-race peoples to describe the ostensibly white Thénardier, when Hugo's insult of the characters is more related to their class, especially in passages that quantify the characters' foreignness.

The Thénardiers are constantly seen as foreign, never showing allegiance to France and profiting from a lack of patriotism by 'conveniently straddling two borders, with a foot in both camps' (II,3,ii,316). Hugo refers to Thénardier's possibly Flemish background, then lists other nationalities he has pretended to be. Ironically, when Hugo makes reference to his pro-abolition stance, he states that the 'theft of a people has no statutory limit. [...] You can't pick the initials off a nation the way you can off a handkerchief' (III,4,i,540) yet does just that when he criticises the Thénardiers and their camp-follower friends by stating that no 'nation was responsible for these creatures' (II,1,xix,296). Not only is the handkerchief simile a naïve and reductionist way to make reference to a centuries-long campaign to

destroy nationality and personhood in enslaved Black people, Hugo does it himself in order to make his antagonists distinctly un-French in blood or in attitude, placing them as foreign, and so evil. Though Thénardier is not as explicitly written to have mixed-race ancestry, he is still portrayed as Habibrah is, containing: '[c]ontamination, duplicity, imposture: such are the consequences of the grotesquely heterogeneous' (Gaitet 257). Like Gaitet, Prasad argues that the 'questionable morality' of the mixed-race characters of *Bug-Jargal* 'stems directly from the indeterminacy of their race' (Prasad 135); their mixed-blood the root of their physical disability. Hugo himself identified as being a 'child born of mixed-blood', being born of parents from Breton and Lorraine, imbuing this birth with language of disability: 'Pallid, blind and mute' (qtd. in Robb 1998, 10). This linking of the mixed-child with physical deformity then transfers not just to the reader but, critically, through the translator and scholar of the novel: when discussing the Patron Minette, Grossman compares them to the 'villainous mestizos Habibrah and Biassou in *Bug-Jargal*', naming Thénardier's gang 'the mixed breeds' who 'become especially dangerous when they constitute a law unto themselves' (Grossman 1994, 18). By protecting his image of what a good Frenchman should look like, Hugo divorces True Evil from the very concept of his nationality, placing distance between bad deeds and French identity, locating these qualities in the 'mongrel' instead, and Grossman, using Hugo's language, conflates the idea of mixed-race, 'mongrel' identity with villainy.

BEAUTIFUL, GOOD, POOR

Fantine's destitution is, like Madame Thénardier's, a racialised, gendered form of suffering. While many of the characters of *LM* experience poverty-based trauma, Fantine's losses are always appearance-based. The narrator notes that Fantine 'had already lost all sense of

shame, she now lost all vanity. A sure sign of the end' (I,5,xi,157). Fantine, as a white

woman, must filter her misery through what Hugo understands to be the pinnacle of female

thought: a pleasing appearance. Her self-worth rests categorically on how she looks, both to

herself and to her peers. Fantine is introduced to the audience as being beautiful (I,3,ii,104;

I,3,iii,108). Her gold and her pearls are her thick 'beautiful hair, the colour of sunlight'

(I,3,ii,103) and her 'beautiful teeth' (104). Fantine is 'pure joy', has 'rosy', 'voluptuous' lips,

'long shadowy eyelashes' (I,3,iii,107), 'deep blue eyes, lustrous eyelids, small, beautifully

high-arched feet, wrists and ankles admirably turned, white skin that showed, here and

there, a bluish arborescence of veins' (I,3,iii,108). When her identity as an unmarried

mother is revealed to the town she is overwhelmed 'with shame even more than despair'

(I,5,viii,151). Despite this, she remains beautiful, with her silk-like 'beautiful hair' (I,5,ix,153).

Once Fantine has lost all physical belongings she owns and the last of her shame, she

becomes 'trash' (I,5,xi,158), 'a sad bejewelled spectre in a dress' (I,5,xii,159), with 'a

forehead covered in wrinkles, flaccid cheeks, pinched nostrils, receding gums, a greyish

complexion, a skinny neck, protruding collarbones, withered limbs, sallow skin, and her

blond hair showed grey at the roots' (I,7,vi,211). The last we see of Fantine, she has no

reason left to be ugly; a manifestation of physical and mental suffering (I,7,vi,211), and so

Hugo assures us she dies with beauty: 'Her long blond eyelashes, the sole remnant of beauty

that had stayed with her from the days of her virginity and her youth, fluttered while

remaining closed' (I,8,i,237).

   While both Javert and Valjean's emotional conflicts disturb their appearances

(I,5,xiii,165; I,6,ii,171-2; I,7,xi,235; I,8,iii,242-3; II,5,x,393) these are almost always rooted in

there being terrifyingly angelic or righteous qualities about the change. At his worst

moment, 'Javert, though horrifying, had nothing of the ignoble about him' (I,8,iii,243) and

once Valjean has grown past being an 'awful' convict (I,2,iii,63), even his fall from Mayoral status has something 'divine' about it (I,7,xi,235). On his deathbed, the disabused Valjean has a look on his face like a death mask: after aging thirty years in the last few months his 'cheeks sagged; the skin on his face was the colour that makes it look like there is dirt over it already' (V,9,iii,1171). Yet even his transformation through Marius and Cosette's acceptance of his past does not de-age him to his youth as it has with Fantine; the only physical change being his turning white as he smiles (V,9,v,1192). Javert is not given a physical description in his final moments, the narrative camera pulling back until we only see a 'tall and black' figure that straightens up and falls into the darkness of the Seine (V,4,i,1088). While we get long, discursive glimpses into the mental state of the two men and their worth to society, Fantine's death is marked by the final and fleeting return of her beauty, a visual display of gendered worth.

It is also Fantine's white, female beauty that absolves her of her ability to feel guilt. Her at times bigoted thoughts are on display in her monologues before Valjean and Javert, in which she pleads for understanding that she is not like other women 'worse than' her who are lazy and drink and yet are 'better off' (I,5,xiii,162; 163). This mentality, a manifestation of patriarchal thought, pits women against each other so that they self-regulate their moral goodness when they are outside male-dominated spaces. Fantine experiences much of her suffering because of moralistic women like her forewoman (I,5,ix,152) and the hospital nuns (I,6,i,169), but rather than align herself with women in a similar position to her own, Fantine places herself above 'sluts' (I,5,xiii,162) and 'peasants' (I,5,x,155) who she sees deserve their suffering. Unlike the Thénardiers, who place blame on others and who are derided because of this (II,3,ii,317), Fantine is allowed to blame others and is cleared of this because she is a beautiful white woman and is thus 'right' to do so.

APPROPRIATION OF SLAVERY

While Hugo does advocate for abolition in the novel (II,2,iii,308; III,1,xi,489) he also places white women's' suffering above the historic, systematic violence towards Black people by misappropriating the language of slavery to discuss situations of oppression which have little in common with the way enslaved Black people were treated. Here we witness the issue of white allyship in the form of white knight idealism rather than the actual implementation of those ideals. When Hugo compares the nunnery to imprisonment he states that they are:

> Two places of slavery; but in [prison], deliverance is possible, a legal limit is always in sight, and there's always escape. In [the nunnery], perpetuity; the only hope, in the extremely distant future, that glimmer of freedom mankind calls death (II,8,ix,471).

Hugo also makes light of the enslavement of Black people when he refers to sex work: 'They say slavery has vanished from European civilization. That is wrong. It still exists, but now it preys only on women, and it goes by the name of prostitution' (I,5,xi,158). By evoking the language of slavery for his white female characters, Hugo puts them in blackface: profiting from the immediate cultural and emotional weight this gives the white characters but paying no heed to how a racist society might vilify a Black woman in the same position. As Ware points out:

> As the movement for women's rights progressed, women were able to exploit the power of the slavery analogy in interpreting their own servitude but without needing any longer to refer to the slaves whose bondage had once outraged and inspired

them (Ware, 109)

We can see the beginnings of this ebb in Hugo's language about the nunnery. By taking only the imagery of Black pain and using it as short-hand to mean 'great suffering', he can graft the imaginary emotional trauma of what can be seen as a 'historic struggle' onto a white female character like Fantine or Cosette without the necessity of addressing contemporary inequality for Black people, or putting anything at stake in demanding a reader's empathy and respect for Black women mistreated by a white society. This misappropriation of slavery vocabulary was not rare in the nineteenth century. In *An Appeal of One-Half of the Human Race, Women, Against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men*, William Thompson attempted to engage female readers in the issue of female suffrage by evoking slavery, as did John Stuart Mill in *The Subjection of Women:* 'I am far from pretending that wives are in general no better treated than slaves; but no slave is a slave to the same lengths, and in so full a sense of the word, as a wife is' (qtd. in Ware, 106). This use of language was also on display in Hugo's own life: Juliette Drouet, one of Hugo's partners, wrote in a letter on May 31, 1839, about the "collar, chain and other ornaments of slavery" that described the maintenance of their secretive relationship (qtd. in Robb 1998, 193).

Hugo's use of the passive voice also implies that he does not see Black women as women. By stating that slavery 'preys only on women', and then describing only piteous white women being affected by enforced destitution and unregulated sex work, Hugo implies that Black women are not classed in the same category as 'women'. Hugo was a proponent of the pseudoscientific use of phrenology, and so it is likely that this internalised view that white women are simply of a different species to Black women was both intentional *and* unthinking in its bias. Prasad makes the case for French Romantic novels to

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be read 'in conversation with the disorders of colonial expansion' like naturalist and scientific treaties, 'not just as inwardly-turned psychological narratives', as we can then better understand the use of race science within character description (Prasad 3). Hugo places white women like Fantine and Cosette above Black people of any gender because of a binary thinking of race and gender as separate issues, as dictated by this period's naturalism-based thinking. Hugo supports the idea of abolishment without addressing the legacies of imperialism and colonization that kept up the slave trade. Hugo does not reflect on his own ideologies or vocabulary, nor on how harmful it is to relegate the enslavement of Black people to a past tense in favour of the current suffering of white women, as if there is only space to talk about one and not the other. In doing so, Hugo upholds the white supremacist view that the suffering of white people is the ultimate (or in fact only) form of suffering that a reader can empathise with, distancing himself from supporting Black people and redirecting his justice-oriented fury towards protecting white women.

Further, by suggesting that the legal abolishment of slavery means that Black people are no longer 'preyed' upon, Hugo sets a dangerous precedent: the silencing of Black people (and non-Black abolitionists) who rightly state that this claim is categorically untrue. To make such a definitive statement about the state of emancipation is to bely Hugo's biased position as a man who benefits from French colonialization and who, while claiming to believe in abolishing physical shackles, does not do the work of decolonising his or his reader's nationalist pride, divorcing France from even the idea of slavery. Within the essay portions of *LM*, Hugo places his idea of France as a great, idealistic melting pot (III,1,xi,488) over its historic reality as part of the institution of slavery, going so far as to distance it by suggesting Paris 'whispers that potent watchword *Liberty* in the ear of the American Abolitionists' (III,1,xi,489; Hugo's italics). Montrose argues that 'appropriation, possession

and domination' are in fact imperatives of the colonialist project (Montrose 19), and we see this imperative in action when Hugo overlooks the 'existence of imperialist ideologies' in his appropriation of slave language, attempting to iterate the idea that white people in France existed in a vacuum, 'oblivious of what was going on in their name', as if by not existing in the same physical space as enslaved Black people, they are excluded from the 'colonizing process' (Ware 37), as is still the case in French-colonial countries to this day. Cleary argues that 'the crucial issue is less the lack of mimetic depiction of imperial atrocity in terms of novelistic content than whether European realism could ever intellectually grasp the totality of capitalist social relations' (Cleary 259). While this is about French Realism and not Romanticism as favoured by Hugo, there is the same struggle in *LM* where Hugo cannot grasp imperialism in its totality, instead appropriating key moments of 'atrocity' such as the language of slavery. In doing so, Hugo dislocates the full extent of imperialism's effect on his world, taking what is useful (vocabulary and pre-set emotional outrage) and leaving what he deems irrelevant (the continued occupation of colonised peoples and places).

NEUTRAL, GUILTY

Jean Valjean is only ever glancingly positioned against non-white racial identity, never for long enough to permanently colour him, but often enough to perpetuate the link between non-white racial identity and criminality. Valjean's physical prowess is an offshoot of his criminality, and so too is his being sunburnt and with a 'savage' complexion. Hugo uses glancing references to non-white racial identity to heighten the external observers' sense of Valjean's criminality, but without a consistency or regularity that indelibly marks Valjean as either Black, Rromani, Native American, or Middle Eastern, leaving the trait 'criminal' with the racial association and not with the man himself.

The first mention of Valjean's skin colour is his sunburn (I,2,i,51), and colourism leads the people of Digne to assume that he is not just a 'dubious-looking tramp' but specifically Rromani (I,2,ii,62) ['un bohémien, un va-nu-pieds, une espèce de mendiant dangeroux' (LM 88)] because of it. When Valjean robs the Savoyard Petit-Gervais of his money, the sun backlights him, 'flushing the savage face of Jean Valjean with a blood-red glow' (I,2,xiii,92), once again associating his criminality with a darker, red skin, and with the term 'savage'. The concept of a sunburnt face has been linked with the European concept of African people with dark skin from the 'beginning of Western literature, in Homer's *Odyssey,* where an object called Ethiopia is established' which became 'embedded in all classical literature' (Miller 1985, 23). The creation of Ethiopia (*aithō* "I burn" + *ōps* "face") 'is thus defined by its people and by the single characteristic that sets them off from the Greek speaker, the darkness of their skin' (*Ibid.* 8). Though not naming Valjean as Ethiopian, the reference to a sun-burnt skin gives Valjean an associational ancestry through reference to the classical Greek concept that Miller argues did not diminish between Homer and nineteenth-century French literature (*Ibid.* 49). Fauchelevent also dubs Valjean a "real Turk!" (II,8,iii,448) because of his strength, using the image of a foreign power to plant the idea of Valjean's beastial strength. Like Boulatruelle, Valjean is also associated with the same Devil disguised as a Black man. Valjean capitalises on the local legend (or is perhaps the originator of the legend itself), burying his life savings in the woods with the built-in deterrent that comes from the locals fearing that a Black man and/or Devil will kill them if they follow. While Boulatruelle bears the brunt of the association with Blackness in Montfermeil society, it is Valjean who is the true culprit in the story, the man who *is* burying treasures in the forest. While it is not clear whether the story preceded Valjean's actions and where the element of the malefactor being a Black man came from, this passage could imply Valjean's being Black

himself, hence the adamance of those who believe the local legend to be based in truth. Whether or not this was Hugo's intention, by associating Valjean with the Black Devil, Hugo problematically links Valjean's criminal actions with blackness, thus creating the false link between Black racial identity and being Evil.

Unlike the Thénardiers however, Valjean is an intelligent businessman who picks up and re-uses information. He single-handedly saves the economy in Montreuil-sur-Mer and its surrounding towns because he adapts a recipe for prayer beads using jet, a material he knows well from his time doing work in Toulon to make more affordable, mass-producible beads. By portraying Valjean's intelligence as borne from anger fuelled during his incarceration, Hugo goes some way to reject the concept that all those with a criminal past are inherently Evil, though does ultimately maintain that Valjean is of a different (deserving) breed to that of the Thénardiers through the imagery of the dark versus the light. The notion that whiteness and lightness connote purity and goodness is deeply embedded in society and thus in literature, from Christian ideas of Goodness and Evil marked by their associations with the light and with the dark to the colourism involved in many cultures' belief that lighter skin is a sign of wealth. As Miller notes: 'from Sanskrit and ancient Greek to modern European languages, black is associated with dirt, degradation and impurity, as if it were the perfect representation of an idea [...] blackness remains a powerful negative element' (1985, 29). These categorisations have informed how colonialization and imperialism have been perpetuated through to the current day. While Valjean is never described as being particularly attractive, the people around him remark on 'the beauty of his white hair' (III,8,i,601), his 'venerable white head' (V,6,iii,1131), and his hair as 'white as snow' (III,6,i,578). Valjean comes to be known as Monsieur Leblanc by Marius (III,8,viii,621)

and as the 'white-haired gentleman' (V,5,ii,1092) by the Gillenormands. White hair does not of course connote being *white* in itself, given that people of all races become white-haired with age, but it does become part of a vocabulary that seeks to enshrine the binary between white and black, in all facets of their use. The respect that is given to Valjean's white hair reaffirms that whiteness is a sure sign of Goodness, at odds with the Thérnadiers' coal-smeared faces, reinforcing the Christian imagery of the Good light and the Evil dark.

VALJEAN THE SLAVE

We once again see the double standard of Hugo's abolitionist stance with his racist language in Valjean's position as a galley slave in a traumatic episode where Valjean witnesses the passing of a chain gang when alone with his daughter Cosette. These men are described as 'demons', 'savage souls', 'dark', 'disfigured', 'monstrous' and 'spectres', the dawn light exaggerating 'the lamentable profiles through the blackness of shadows' (IV,3,viii,747). While Hugo evokes the 'tangled heap' of a convoy, referring to plurals of people with 'bare skulls, grey beards' and 'faces that were childish', Hugo also pauses to specifically focus on one man within the ranks: an unnamed Black man who 'had once, perhaps, been a slave and could compare chains' (747). In a similar way to the cultural and emotional weight that blackface gives Fantine, upon seeing the convicts pass Valjean becomes a double of the enslaved Black man and the rabble of shadowed criminals. Valjean's eyes 'were the deep window on the soul that replaces gazing eyes in certain long-suffering people; such a look seems oblivious to reality, reflecting past horrors and calamities' (IV,3,viii,748). This doubling of the enslavement of Black people and galley slavery is a two-pronged abolitionist stance. Hugo is adamantly anti-slavery in any form, which we can see in his direct derision of galley slavery shown when he sarcastically lauds how the king 'in his inexhaustible

clemency' has 'deigned to commute [Valjean's death sentence] to that of hard labour in

perpetuity' (II,2,i,302). Hugo also continues his criticism in his subsequent disdain at how

the Spanish American wars of independence were 'a bid for enslavement' that 'outraged the

democratic spirit' of France's military:

> In this campaign, the goal of the French soldier; that son of democracy, was to put
>
> others under the yoke. Nasty nonsense. France is made to stir people's souls, not
>
> smother them (II,2,iii,308).

While Hugo occasionally embeds anti-slavery missives and is clearly condemning the social

degradation that has led to the 'abandonment of children' (II,8,ix,482) and their removal

from the streets of France for use in the galleys, Hugo cannot divorce himself from the

colonial mindset. Hugo begins this 'bit of history' (482) with a defence: 'Louis XIV, to go no

further back in time, wanted to build a naval fleet. For very good reason – nothing wrong

with the idea. But let's just look at the way they went about it' (483). Hugo does not refuse

the romanticisation of colonisation, but that the use of white, French children as galley

slaves problematises it. It is this double standard, where white people's suffering is

presented as being of greater importance than that of non-white (especially Black) peoples'

lives that displays the core disconnect between Hugo's intended message and unwitting

truths spoken through his biased language. This bias continually manifests itself because,

while he is at the centre of this direct link between American slavery and the enslavement

of French convicts, Valjean is given the opportunity to be liberated from his association with

slavery, criminality, and thus his link to Blackness, no longer the haunted double of the Black

man in the chain gang. Hugo uses Valjean as his frontispiece to gradually change the

opinions of those who view ex-convicts as irredeemable: Valjean is repeatedly referred to as

a galley slave (I,2,vii,80; I,2,xiii,94; 96; I,7,iii,190; I,7,xi,233, I,8,v,247; II,4,iii,365; V,4,i,1081; V,7,ii,1150) and the narrator often marks how others treat him after his bourgeois disguise has been lifted and he has revealed his past to pathetic effect. At first the town of Montreuil-sur-Mer heartlessly forgets all the good he has done because he was 'nothing but a galley slave' (I,8,v,247), then Javert is astounded that he finds 'A galley slave, sacred!' (V,4,i,1081), until finally Marius comes to the realisation that to be a galley slave and to be a good man are not antithetical traits and the 'convict was transfigured into Christ' (V,9,iv,1186). In depicting Valjean as the repenting (white) galley slave, Hugo encourages us to transfer the legacy of our feelings about the treatment of enslaved Black people onto a white character and thus decry the practise of slavery in all forms:

> Aren't endless chains beyond human endurance? Who, then, would blame Sisyphus or Jean Valjean for saying: "That's enough!" (V,6,iv,1134)

As Susan Meyer argues, this use of race as metaphor 'draws our attention' not to the 'humanity, or even oppression' of the race of people invoked, but to the white person whose oppression is made to be 'in common' with them (Meyer 22-3). Despite Hugo's abolitionist intention, no explicitly or codified Black person is given this same liberation from a tie with criminality or from enslavement. Blackness is thus left tied to fear, the Devil and a sense of *rightful* subjugation in the mind of the reader, while the white Valjean rises into deserving Goodness. Futher, Bellos makes the link between why Valjean was able to amass so much wealth in his factory as Mayor Madeleine: the immense quantities of beads bought by the Spanish to be used in Africa as 'trade beads' for the purchasing of enslaved people. 'Perhaps Victor Hugo knew without knowing that the rapid accumulation of wealth in Europe was connected with the horrors of colonial trade, and that Madeleine's laudable

relief of poverty in Montreuil-sur-Mer was part of a global network responsible for the most

wretched form of human life at that time' (Bellos 74-5). Leaving behind those to fester

forever as criminal and as Black because they cannot free themselves from their cycles of

criminality, the white-aligned Valjean is able to purchase his freedom with the continued

enslavement of others. By clutching at whiteness bought by capitalism, he is liberated to die

a death on his own terms, no longer enslaved himself. Valjean, as a man Hugo most likely

envisioned as a white man, is able to shift from Evil to Good in a way Black people are never

granted, enforcing the idea that irreparable and permanent criminality is only inherent to

Black people and not to their white counterparts.

CONCLUSION

Though no protagonist nor antagonist of *LM* are given a specific non-white ethnicity, Hugo

makes undeniable categories, taxonomizing his characters along lines of darkness,

foreignness and Evil, and lightness, French-ness and Goodness. Much in the same way that

the *D&D* orc has a biological propensity that mirrors eugenic, colonial perceptions of Black

people, so too do those associated with the Thénardiers. Elves, who are lightness and

intelligence incarnate are embodied in the perfection of the beautiful, feminine French

youths Cosette, Fantine and Enjolras. White superiority is not argued for in the way a reader

of the *Southern Gazette* might hope it to be, but Hugo relies on colonial fears, tropes and

language that certainly sustain racist ideologies.

CHAPTER TWO: Adaptations

2018/9 ADAPTATIONS

As of May 2021, there are 148 adaptations of Hugo's novel listed on Wikipedia spanning plays, novels, games, films, TV shows and radio plays, without counting the numerous 'unofficial' adaptations like webseries and self-published adaptations. Out of these numerous adaptations, I have chosen to analyse three of the 'official' screen adaptations: the 2019 Japanese drama レ・ミゼラブル 終わりなき旅路 [*Les Misérables Owarinaki Tabiji; Les Misérables a Never Ending Journey*], the 2019 French film *Les Misérables* and the 2018/9 BBC/PBS co-produced miniseries written by Andrew Davies *Les Misérables*. I have chosen these three because they were all released in the six months between December 2018 and May 2019 in three different countries, which allows me to undertake a geographical, cultural and linguistic comparison in a fairly tight timeframe. Bradley Stephens is the first to present analysis on the BBC's adaptation in 2022, and there is some mention of Ly's adaptation in unrelated criticism, but there has thus far been no work on Owarinaki Tabiji, a full length criticism of gender and race as operatives in these adaptations, nor a comparison of the three. In the following chapter, I consider how each work chose to adapt Hugo's contemplations on nineteenth century 'social asphyxia' (preface, xlv) for a 2019 audience, 'shaping the narrative to different media and allowing it to interact with their own biographical, social, and historical situations' (Grossman and Stephens 2016, 9). While these adaptations aired within months of one another, and the UK, the USA, France and Japan are similarly globalised countries that share many contemporary issues, the audience they aired to do not have the same cultural conceptions of Hugo's *LM*, and I argue that this is the fundamental reason why each adaptation depicts race and gender as they do.

ADAPTATION AND FIDELITY

As I will continue to argue, my definition of what constitutes an adaptation is a broad one that makes no hierarchical judgement regardless of producer (writer/director/production company), budget, medium or fidelity. Linda Hutcheon refers to 'adaptations as *adaptations*' (Hutcheon 114, her italics), asking us to hesitate before splitting adaptations into modes or genres. Her language is very much that of a defender, her three threads adding to the sense that Hutcheon was writing at a point in critical theory where adaptations (especially filmic and gamic ones) were treated as lesser art forms. I am not so concerned with the long and discursive take down of literature from its place as the 'superior art form' (Hutcheon 4) because this field of study is already populated with convincing arguments. Stam for example describes the current field as having a reactionary, conservative mentality, scholars questioning whether the youth of today, born into a media-saturated internet era, still read books when Netflix exists, and whether literary classics are fated to die under the flood of new media. Stam refutes this by suggesting that these same classics are in fact destined to survive '*only* thanks' to their continued adaptation (Stam 2019, 93; his italics), giving a long exemplar syllabus of a front-to-back way of teaching, using games, films and other adaptations as an access point to literature rather than as a bastardisation of it (Stam 2019, 94). While making a timeline of oft-repeated theories in adaptation studies, with the aim of drawing attention to more than a century's worth of scholarship that is often uncited, Kamilla Elliott argues that 'fidelity has *always* been robustly challenged in adaptation studies [...] Indeed, the critique of fidelity has become so commonplace that the critique of this critique is also widely reiterated' (24-5, emphasis Elliott's). Strong is one of many adaptation critics to also preface his work on adaptations

with the fidelity caveat: 'Although the dragon of 'fidelity' as the presumed ideal of adaptation has been slain time and again by scholars in adaptation studies, it remains a perennially popular criterion in reviews of and popular responses to 'literature-on-screen' (Strong 166). Strong argues that no matter how broadly adaptation studies treat the term 'adaptation' and declares that fidelity is no longer the 'ideal' for adaptation critics, people who watch adaptations will continue to consider fidelity to the 'source' text as a merit. As Rosenstone describes, our 'basic reaction is to think a film is really a book somehow transformed to the screen, which means that it should do what we expect a book to do: get things right' (Rosenstone 40-1). We must concede that due to the nature of adaptations we must continue to consider fidelity as an aspect of comparison (though not the primary or sole focus), and so I briefly refer to when and why these adaptations touch upon canon. Stephens draws on 'emergent' practices in adaptation studies, using Kranz and Mellerski and Hermansson to 'rehabilitate so-called fidelity criticism', advocating for the 'pragmatic' application of fidelity as one part of a toolkit of criticism (2019, 4-5). I use this pragmatic approach, and do so especially as a useful lens when texts are 'Oedipally envious and worshipful at the same time' (Hutcheon 7), where an adaptor wishes to join the ranks of definitive works yet obsesses with and then decries its predecessors to do so.

John Ellis argues that often when an adapted text is 'a canonical one', we rely on 'a generally circulated cultural memory' (Ellis 3) as opposed to first-hand knowledge of the text itself. Hutcheon builds on this by arguing that the traditional case study model (in which a film is directly compared to its 'source' novel as Brian McFarlane does in *Novel to Film*); privileges the 'source' text or the 'original'. Hutcheon states that a) 'sources' can often be plural, and b) that often audiences read back to the 'so-called original *after* we have

experienced the adaptation,' challenging notions of priority or linearity of versions

(Hutcheon xv). As mentioned above, there are currently 148 'official' adaptations of *LM*

listed on Wikipedia, the most widely known undoubtably being the musical composed by

Claude-Michel Shönberg and written by Alain Boublil, adapted into the 2012 film directed by

Tom Hooper. With fan-created wikis, it is simple practise to cross-reference what is

canonical across adaptations, even without having watched every adaptation or ever

reading the novel. *LM* as a universe thus becomes heterocosmic ('as in another cosmos'

(Hutcheon xxiv)), where we no longer see adaptations of the (pure) Hugo novel but of the

LM lore that fans since 1862 have built upon, gaining 'new currency, different purchase and

additional cultural values in new contexts, eras, and media' (Griffiths, Stephens and Watts

128). Similar to Hutcheon's heterocosms, Stam re-creates the Bakhtinian idea of 'excess

seeing' by using the standard shot/counter shot structure of film editing as a comparison to

how we may view adaptations: as complementary perspectives of people, genre, media and

cultures building a fuller awareness of the source text. Stam uses Balzac's *retour des*

personnages (where characters reappear in various novels) to describe how remakes and

constant adaptations of a source text interweave to create a sense of diaspora throughout a

universe created around the legacies of a text. In this diaspora, racial and cultural diaspora

can unite in foreignness throughout *LM* adaptations. I will track this mentality onto my

analysis of the *LM* universe, where while each adaptation stands as its own planet, as a

universe of diaspora texts they interact (some more than others), linked by their shared big

bang.

  This brings the issue of understanding what 'fidelity' means to a watcher of a *LM*

adaptation. Despite the attempt at neutrality an encyclopaedia brings, the welcome page of

the largest *LM* wiki on fandom.com states: 'This Wiki is all about the wonderful musical and

book it is based on!' ("Home" *Les Misérables Wiki*), and all text is set against the poster of the 2012 film. Character pages tend to have the actor who portrayed them in the 2012 film as their icons, except in the case of obscure characters who have had more prominent role in other adaptations (actor Johnny Flynn, for example, stands in for Félix Tholomyès, who does not exist in the musical adaptation). The cultural memory of what is canonically or intrinsically *LM* is thus often affected by an adaptation (or series of adaptations) more than it is by first-hand knowledge of the novel. As Roche argues:

> Evidence of all kinds—from the empirical to the most subjective—proves that a great number of Hugo's characters surpassed long ago the borders of their textual representation, taking on larger-than-life status and a subsequent autonomous existence and mythology all their own in popular culture (2007, 179).

As adaptations come and go, qualities such as chosen plotlines, characterisations, themes, castings, dress, and phrases do not build linearly, or like the branches of a family tree like other franchise 'universes' might. Marvel's cinematic universe did for example have a linear trajectory and a set of lore that separated it from the comic branches it chose to adapt until late 2021. Adaptors of *LM* therefore build a heterocosm. In this cosmos, planets spin and meteors fall: occasionally a character is closer to Hugo's description, sometimes they are closer in relation to another film, and sometimes they do not exist at all.

Hutcheon describes a scale where the viewer of an adaptation is described from 'audience member' to 'rabid fan', where the adapter's use of self-referential nods and being faithful to 'treasured' moments must be measured against what the target audience's likelihood of 'knowing' might be. She points out that there is a new measure of 'fidelity' to where a successful adaptation must now layer different levels of 'knowing' nods to appease

audience members of different knowledges (Hutcheon 120). With *LM* adaptations, it is likelier that an audience member will understand a reference to the phrase "I dreamed a dream" than to an evocation to the name Tholomyès, but subtly including both would be a deep reference for a *rabid* fan who can link the song from the musical to the man Fantine is dreaming about. Hutcheon therefore argues that for an adaptation to be successful, it must cater to 'both knowing and unknowing audiences', with gaps built in to allow space for the adapted text to breathe and for an adaptor to have creative freedom, but not too much that unknowing audiences are left out (Hutcheon 121). She believes that the pleasure of adaptation comes from 'repetition with variation', where the 'comfort of ritual' is combined with the 'piquancy of surprise' (Hutcheon 4), where both the pleasure and frustration of an audience's relationship with an adaption comes through 'familiarity bred through repetition and memory' (Hucheon 21). Griffiths, Stephens and Watts argue that *LM* is case in point for this, where its adaptations 'offer audiences the thrill of newness in a context of the already known: a product which is both culturally sanctioned and in some sense pre-validated' (Griffiths, Stephens and Watts 127). I capitalise on this theory throughout this chapter, and I also note moments from adaptations that work as either repetitions or as surprises, asking why an adaptor might choose these tools to comfort or discomfort an un/knowing audience member. This also sets a precedent for us to consider how we may read Hugo back through the lens of an adaptation or even through fanwork, as many audiences do.

PART ONE: LYMIS AND ART-ACTIVISM

The 2019 French film *Les Misérables* (hereafter *LyMis*)[10] is a documentary-style drama created by director Ladj Ly with scriptwriters Giordano Gederlini and Alexis Manenti that takes inspiration from predominantly French West African, North African, and Arab diaspora civil unrest in 2005 and 2008. While *LyMis* is French, as Ly is a French filmmaker, he is also a child of immigrants from Mali, a West African country that was taken under French colonial rule. Unlike many other adaptations of Hugo's *LM*, Ly uses his film as Hugo does his novel: a conscious piece of art-activism intended to 'bring real lasting change' by inspiring anarchistic and revolutionary thought within his audience (qtd. in Obenson). Far from being a page-to-screen adaptation of the Hugo novel, auteur Ly uses his film to translate Hugo's message for his dual audience: the majority-white, award season audiences who can be used to leverage the secondary audience, the government currently failing the people the film documents.

Western festivals and award ceremonies uphold white supremacy, from cast to crew to audience to the judging panels themselves, as called out by the multitude of #SoWhite movements. As Stam observes, French cultural prestige (in the form of film festivals and awards) is a form of cultural imperialism, where power over which films have 'worth' is centred on (white) French sensibility (Stam 2020, 51), with European and Hollywood films lauded as archetypes of industry standard quality and quantity (Stam 2019, 106-7). Ly purposefully intends his film about his *miserable* community to effect an affluent watcher of typical 'quality' films. In doing so, *LyMis* becomes a spiritual successor to Mathieu Kassovitz's 1995 film *La Haine*, both receiving press attention for attracting the (eventually

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[10] I use the subtitle translation provided by Ambrealys Petonnet-Vincent via Netflix unless otherwise stated.

ineffectual) attention of their respective heads of state and government, President

Emmanuel Macron (Jeffries, *The Guardian*) and Prime Minister Alain Juppé (Johnston, *The*

Independent) after achieving accolades at the Cannes, César, Lumières and Academy

festivals for their depictions of French police brutality.

A DOCUMENTARY

Hugo, writing *LM* in political exile, and Kassovitz and Ly, two contemporary filmmakers

writing from marginalised perspectives, root their narratives in contemporary reality. Hugo

uses the persona of a historian to meld real, tangible histories with his fictional characters to

create a sense of validity so that his work (and the injustices he seeks to correct in society)

cannot be dismissed. His essays on the battle of Waterloo, the French sewer system and the

oral history of slang are the most obviously documentarian, as is his stating that: 'Last year,

1861, on a lovely morning in May, a wanderer, the man telling this tale, arrived from

Nivelles […] He was on the battlefield of Waterloo' (II,1,i,255-6) as a preface to his eventual

introduction to the Thénardier and Georges Pontmercy Waterloo-based plotline

(II,1,xix,295). In a similar fashion, Kassovitz's *La Haine* uses real news footage from reports

of the deaths of Malik Oussekine and Makome M'Bowole at the hands of the police in 1993

to lend both credence and weight to the film. In introducing real-world consequences to the

filmic narrative, the creators force an association between the potentially abstract, news-

bound concept of death at the hands of police to the *people* depicted in the narrative, using

the emotions the work may inspire in an audience member as a gateway into abolitionist

belief and practise. Hugo's considerations of the abolition of slavery thus find a

contemporary political equivalent: the abolition of the police.

Ly grounds the nineteenth-century plot of *LM* by recontextualising it in a specific twenty-first century event. *LyMis* deliberately begins with a moment of French unity, the prepubescent protagonist Issa (played by Issa Perica) and his Tricolore-bedecked friends joining the Parisians watching the 2018 FIFA World Cup. Singing the chorus to *La Marseillaise* with the crowd, the group of Black boys are unabashedly and unquestioningly French, Ly presenting the brothers-in-arms as so intrinsic to the body of Paris that they join the Eiffel Tower as part of the skyline (Figure 3). As France wins the Cup, pride and euphoria become cohesion between the massively multi-ethnic crowd, strangers forming a mass of riotous glee in their red, white and blue. The football fans mirror what is one of the most culturally well-known images of Hugo's *LM*: the building of the barricades with French flags in the foreground, as the mass of fans form structures from café furniture (Figure 4), enforcing the idea that while the plot of the film may be fictional, the Parisians and emotions portrayed are current, tangible, and immediately relevant. Ly uses Hugo's barricade and France's win to create an immediate shared sense of trust that this is a French film intended for a French audience, heightening camaraderie that may not typically be felt between French audience members of different ethnicities.

Beginning the film with this documentarian vision of what childhood should look like is a political act. In this opening scene we witness unbridled Black joy, Issa and his friends screaming their delight. It is the only time we see Issa and his friends laughing through the film (Figure 5). In granting us this short vision of a fairy tale ideal, of brotherhood and equality, Ly lifts Issa and his friends from their natural state into a position that is recognisable and relatable to an audience member of a different background in order to cast Issa in the image of an everyman character. When Issa is then forced back into his daily routine, a place a (white, middle-class) audience have been conditioned to ignore, the

audience have already formed an attachment to Issa and thus have a desire to return him to that place of extreme joy. Ly makes a political statement by asserting narrative power (via protagonist status) to a usually invisible body, making the need to redistribute vocal and bodily autonomy not only visible but transforming it into a *desirable* outcome.

Figure 3 A shot from LyMis. A line of six Black boys wearing blue and white t-shirts wave French flags with their backs to us. Before them is the Eiffel tower, set in a white sky.

Figure 4 A shot from LyMis. A crowd of mixed-race male football fans in red, white and blue football jerseys wave French flags and chant in joy. Some hold up cafe furniture. Behind them is a Brasserie called Le Marceau.

Figure 5 A shot from LyMis. Issa, a young Black boy with brown skin and short afro is yelling with delight, holding a French flag behind him like a cape. Two other Black boys laugh beside him. Issa wears a black and white jersey.

This documentary-like beginning, including a hand-held camera that gets knocked about by the crowd, direct-to-camera address by ecstatic members of the public and the subsequent breaking of the fourth wall was filmed during the real 2018 victory, and this sense of reality is heightened by Ly's background in documentary filmmaking. As a film intended not for television like *Owarinaki* or *BBCMis* but the award-circuit followed by a world-wide but limited release, the film is designed to be unrelenting and encompassing, watched in a public, social setting where there is a sense of a communal bonding over the film; from sharing in a physical or vocal response during the film, or interacting with people's opinions while walking out of the auditorium. By forcing this heightened sense of community on his audience and attaching it to the documentary form that typically plays on an audience's guilt to force change, Ly forges a contract with his audience, asking them how they intend to change their own behaviours in the reflexive period after the film has ended.

Ly does not weaponize white guilt as many documentaries about social conditions made by typically white documentarians about Black people do (Hjort 7), which have the tendency to 'draw [an audience] into self-preoccupation and escapism' (Steele 502). These often have the consequence of pushing Black people 'lower so that we can be lifted up' by a white saviour (Steele 505). Ly instead attempts to use guilt to promote white consciousness for universal solidarity. As Steele argues:

> This is not to say that guilt is never the right motive for doing good works or showing concern […] Guilt is a civilizing emotion when the fear for the self that it carries is contained – a containment that allows guilt to be more selfless and that makes genuine concern possible (Steele 502).

The reflexive guilt felt by a non-Black audience member on watching the film is intended to be one that promotes communal solidarity, evoking the feeling of the 2018 World Cup win, rather than a dividing one that focuses on individual reparations. As Ly points out in an interview with David Walsh, the film is 'not just a revolt against the police, it's a revolt against everything, against the entire system that puts in place these figures, whether it's the cops, the self-appointed "mayor," the drug trafficker. It's a general revolt' (Walsh, *WSWS*). While Issa is the protagonist of the film, what Ladj Ly's film demands is not Issa's specific adoption out of the system that harms him via a white saviour, but an institutional change of the nation-wide poverty that creates the system in the first place, which can only come about with the assistance of the well-off, capital-holding audience member.

HUGO IN LY

Ly does not explicitly name his characters after Hugo's, but instead challenges us to find commonalities. In considering how colonisation can and does still affect adaptations, Hutcheon quotes Jean-Claude Carrière, who while adapting the *Mahabharata* recognised:

> the possibility of unconscious colonization by way of vocabulary, since the action of translating Indian words translates our relationship to an entire civilization. To say that we could find an equivalent for every Indian word implies that French culture can in a word appropriate the most profoundly reflected notions of Indian thought (Carrière 1985: 14, trans. Hutcheon, 152).

This idea that all deeply cultural experiences can be translated word-for-word across languages, races, countries, times and cultures is, as Carrière states, a colonial belief that assumes that white (here, French) language can both understand and consume all else in

the world and digest it, producing better, Classics-worthy texts. Ly does not attempt this kind of adaptation of Hugo's novel, choosing not to give analogous characters and situations to break the conflation of equality between lived experiences by the two authors.

There is one in-film acknowledgment of Hugo's novel in *LyMis*, in which the characters show a basic knowledge of *LM* but hold apparent apathy towards it. As local officers Chris (Alexis Manenti) and Gwada (Djebril Zonga) introduce Stéphane (Damien Bonnard) to Montfermeil, Ly builds a camaraderie between us and the three officers by keeping the camera stationary in the seat beside Stéphane, as if we too are being welcomed into the community [0:13:30]. We feel included in the banter, our attention occasionally flicking away from the monologuing Chris in the front passenger seat to stare out of the windows he commentates over, as if on a safari. We sometimes check Gwada's reactions in the driver's seat, and then glance to an increasingly incredulous Stéphane. Chris controls the cramped confines of the car with the hazing-style misinformation about the Black, Arab, Muslim, immigrant residents, positioning himself as both intellectually and experientially superior until he asks:

> CHRIS: Culture Quiz. Why is the school named after Victor Hugo?
>
> STÉPHANE: Because he wrote *Les Misérables* in Montfermeil.
>
> GWADA: Not good. We got ourselves a nerd.
>
> CHRIS: You read the book?
>
> STÉPHANE: No, I read it on the town hall's website. [0:14:35]

While there is an Avenue Victor Hugo and a Fontaine Valjean to memorialise Cosette's childhood in Montfermeil, there is no school named after the author, nor was *LM* written there but while he was in exile in Guernsey. Hugo's novel holds no relevance for these three

men other than as a 'nerdy' factoid about their local area (that is ultimately incorrect), but Chris is caught off-guard at the possibility that Stéphane might be the 'intello' [nerd] Gwada dubs him, which invalidates Chris' self-appointed position as expert. To reclaim his lost valour, Chris clings to the narrative thread that resonates with the guided tour he's just given, adapting the novel with a one-man performance:

> STÉPHANE: [Montfermeil] doesn't seem to have changed much [since the novel].
>
> CHRIS: No. … But now, Gavroche is pronounced 'Gaveroche.' [*in a North African accent*] Gaveroche, come here. Now. Come here! And 'Cosette' is called 'Causete'. [*In a pitiful voice*] Causete's mother works at the post office. She's tired. Causete is tired. She works too much. Causete's mommy. Ah la la. [0:14:50]

Despite the easy acknowledgement that there has been little change in the poverty of the area since Hugo's time, Chris holds a vocal disdain for the two fictional children, mocking both the narrative and the families in question. Chris casts Gavroche and Cosette as the children of immigrants, adopting a stock African francophone accent as he impersonates the scolding parent of Gaveroche, then by parroting *miserable* lines he has overheard from pleading single mothers. Chris's long-suffering 'ah la la' becomes part of the mantle of Javert, as if he is speaking from the centuries of interactions with woeful single-mother-Fantines pleading to be let off for the sake of their daughters in adaptation after adaptation. The dismissive 'ah la la' signals that he has become desensitised to such rote pleas, and is reminiscent of Javert's frank lack of care in previous adaptations such as the musical:

> FANTINE: There's a child who sorely needs me / Please M'sieur, she's but that high / Holy God, is there no mercy? / If I go to jail she'll die!
>
> JAVERT: I have heard such protestations / Every day for twenty years / Let's have no

more explanations / Save your breath and save your tears ("Fantine's Arrest").

This short exchange is based on a far longer interaction between the two in Hugo's novel, after Javert has arrested Fantine. Fantine gives a sorrowful monologue to the policeman, begging him not to give her such an extended amount of prison time:

> "Six months making seven sous a day! But what will happen to Cosette? What about my daughter! My daughter!" / [Fantine] 'slumped into a heap, murmuring: "Mercy!" [...] Javert turned his back on her' (I,5,xiii,161-2).

As Chris supersedes Hugo's characters with the families of *his* Montfermeil (Issa's mother is just one of the single mothers of the banlieue Chris might be casting as Fantine), he slips easily into the role of the villain with much the same relish as his appropriation of his nickname *cochon rose* [pink pig]. He cares little for either Hugo's characters or their contemporary counterparts, mocking anyone who might find such similarities between fiction and his contemporaries pitiable. By adapting the story for his own purposes, Chris willingly casts himself as the story villain, gladly taking the power that this affords him.

Chris purposefully cultivates a relationship between his underlings Gwada and Stéphane, physically imposing in their space and disallowing personal boundaries between them in order to build a wall between them and those who might seek to undermine him. As the film progresses and solidarity between the three cops deteriorates, Chris's joking demeanour cracks. When his authority is challenged, Chris is quick to lose his temper, especially when outnumbered by his fellow police officers. At the midpoint of the film, he is crowded into Salah's café with everyone he once thought he presided over: the Black and Muslim citizens, their children, the Middle Eastern club owner/police informant 'the Claw'

and the officers who now physically hold him back and verbally berate him. Cornered by his own actions, Chris paces the trap he's set himself, shouting "I am the Law!" in an attempt to regain his sense of ownership over the Black and brown community he terrorises [01:02:26]. Boublil and Schönberg's song "Javert's Suicide" includes the similar line: 'I am the Law and the Law is not mocked'; which is an essentialisation of Hugo's characterisation of Javert as an over-zealous lawman. This scene echoes Hugo's unflattering description of Javert at his worst: when arresting Fantine for allegedly attacking a gentleman, '[Javert] raised his head with an expression of sovereign authority, an expression always all the more frightening, the lower down power is vested, ferocious in a wild beast, atrocious in a nobody' (I,5,xiii,164-5). In realising he has been demoted from predator status but not knowing when, Chris/Javert can only attempt to make himself bigger, both physically and with the weight given by institutional allegiance. Chris and Javert, both adamantly believing themselves to be superior to those they deem criminal, are portrayed as 'atrocious' in their lack of self-awareness, especially when that comes to misinterpreting their own actions as those of the law.

Javert is the embodiment of Hugo's criticism of excessive policing, specifically the too-literal interpretations of Justice. Even despite this, Javert's belief that he is the Law is not the bluff that Chris's is. While Javert somewhat revels in being a 'cochon rose', doffing his hat with humour as he arrests the Patron Minette gang (III,8,xx,667), Chris is not an exact adaptation of Javert as he does not truly believe that the law *is* just, and that is what he enjoys about his power. Chris also does not reconcile his past actions with adapted concepts of 'Justice', ending the film without facing accountability. Throughout the film but in this scene especially, Chris has more in common with Thénardier:

he resented the whole human race and contained inside him a furnace of hate, being

one of those people who are always getting revenge, who blame anyone in the

vicinity for anything that befalls them and are always ready to throw the sum of all

the disappointments, failures, and calamities of their life at the first comer as a

legitimate grievance (II,3,ii,317).

Chris acts in his own interests through the scene, and his target, Salah, offers his wrists to the policeman to call his bluff. All who witness this understand that were Chris truly acting as part of the law, he would not need to rely on threats. His outburst is immature and undignified as he realises he is no longer protected from the consequences of his actions by his reliance on his status as police.

There is a moment of dissonance as Chris arrives home after his day of harassing Black youth, only to greet his heavily pregnant wife, played by Marine Sainsily, a mixed-race, light-skinned Black woman and their two daughters [01:15:35]. With their straight, blonde-brunette hair and white skin, the two girls resemble their father more than they do their curly-haired mother, and we are likely unsurprised to find that despite their similar age to Issa and his friends, their only concern is fighting over whose turn it is to play with their dolls. The family is not rich, but they do not live in the same cramped apartments that even Chris's second-in-command, Gwada, does. Chris's daughters remain safely within the frame of childhood, protected by their mother in the sun-lit living-room of their house as the young Éponine and Azelma are by Hugo's Thénardiers. Though Chris is not overtly loving in this one moment of domesticity, he is not abusive; these women do not fear his presence in their life. This soft, white-walled room is a protected sphere of female domesticity that does not fear interference from the violent, male outsider. Unlike the inhabitants of the

unprotected and flimsy walls, doors and windows of the banlieue, Chris's family do not need

to worry about being spied on by drones, raided by cops or having their physical safety and

privacy otherwise attacked. The twenty-second scene is a visible reminder of the privilege of

comfort, and is the film's only analogy to what Hugo's vision of 'society, represented by a

property owner and voter' (I,5,xiii,161) might look like in our contemporary eye. Unlike

Gwada, whose family and relations live within the buildings the police trio have been

attacking (even leveraging this insider status to go behind doors locked to Chris and

Stéphane) [00:43:51], Chris can make sure his family remain separate from his enforcement

of the law by removing them from the immigrant areas, effectively divorcing any personal

stakes from his decision to ransack the community. In his adaptation, Ly disrupts typical

choices, making nods to Hugo's characters but dislodging who might traditionally take the

role (often against race and gender canon) to challenge who is miserable and who is

oppressor in the film.

ISSA, THE BEAST AND HUGO

Throughout the film, Issa embodies the legacy of several of Hugo's characters. It is easy to

cast him, as Chris does, in the role of Gavroche, a 'boisterous, wan, agile, bright, cocky boy,

[with] no roof over his head, no bread, no fire, no love, but [...] jubilant because he was free'

(III,1,xiii,491). As Issa plays football with his friends, there are the sudden shouts that warn

of the cops (prompting his hasty escape), echoing the gamins of Hugo's Paris who call

"Yoooo-hooo! There's flatfoots about, there's cops, grab yer gear and beat it, cut through

the sewer!" (III,1,viii,485). Ly's gamins, who don't have enough money to pool together to

buy burgers from a food cart, who are not seen indoors (other than in corridors / stairwells),

and who have homes but live on the streets, are clear descendants from Hugo's Gavroche and friends, but their existence is not as poeticized as Hugo's boys. In Hugo's thirteen-chapter long lecture on the state of the Parisian gamin, he romanticises the existence of these homeless children, telling us about their 'joy' (III,1,i,477), 'freedom' (III,1,ii,478), 'radiant happiness' (III,1,iii,479) and philosophical nature (III,1,iv,480). Despite acknowledging that child poverty is a 'disastrous social symptom', Hugo asserts that the Parisian gamin should not be considered sad:

> All the crimes of the man begin in the straying of the child. / We should except Paris, though. Relatively speaking, and notwithstanding the memories just called to mind, the exception is only fair. [...] the *gamin de Paris*, we must insist, no matter how rough and damaged on the surface, is more or less intact on this inside (III,1,vi,482).

Because their location is Paris, Hugo argues that to be a gamin is an existence with fairy tale status: Gavroche is referred to as a 'pygmy' (IV,6,ii,787; V,1.xvi,999), an 'imp and a little devil' (IV,11,i,880), and as a 'will-o'-the-wisp child' (V,1,xv,998). As the National Guard shoot at him, 'the soldiers laughed [...] This was not a child, it was not a man; it was a strange fairy larrikin' (998).

Ly's Issa is not, however, afforded the luxury of not knowing his political position. Issa cannot be seen as an apolitical child casualty to revolution, nor can he exist as part of a fairy tale through the majority of the film. We first meet Issa at the police station, where a white man we assume to be his guardian verbally and then physically attacks him. Through the film he is referred to as a "brat" but is treated as an adult. Rather than the lovable and cheeky gamin language of Gavroche, Issa is treated as Champmathieu is in Hugo's novel, the

man accused of being Valjean and treated as a criminal because of his similar appearance and self-admitted lack of education:

> The counsel for the prosecution [...] addressed the presiding judge: "Monsieur le president, in the presence of the confused but extremely cunning denials of the accused, who is clearly trying to pass himself off as an idiot, but who will not succeed – we warn him" (I,7,x,229).

Both Ly and Hugo make clear through Issa and Champmathieu that words, no matter how honest or carefully crafted, are useless against powers that do not want to listen. Issa has very few lines in the film, Ly making the boy physically voiceless in his struggle against the powers that control his life, communicating mostly in cries of pain or wordless anguish. When Issa is granted time to speak, he is physically forced to echo police lies, or he is attempting to spread the word about the injustices he has seen. "You steal something, you're dead," Issa tells his friends at the dumping ground they use as a playground, having recently returned from a trip to his family's unnamed home country [0:17:03]. His friends do not believe him, and he cannot find a way to voice what he is wanting to say so he drops the subject. His lack of ability to voice his thoughts is what goads him towards action, stealing a caged lion-cub from Zeffirelli's circus as a physical way to put thought into action, but once this action has been commenced, Issa is not given the opportunity to explain himself, instead hounded by, grievously injured by, then once again silenced by the police. While appearing at first to be the 'bushy-tailed' gamin Gavroche (IV,12,ii,899), Issa is forced into adulthood and must play the role of a man, having to become the 'cunning' convict the prosecution believes Champmathieu is in order to ensure his own survival.

Blockaded in all directions by the society he was brought up in, Issa is pushed throughout the film until he claims the last beat: holding a bottle bomb in a tight staircase, assumedly intending to kill the policemen who have hounded him and himself with them [1:35:03]. This may be a nod to Marius' plan of attack, in which he holds a flame to a keg of gunpower, threatening the municipal guards attacking the barricade:

"Clear out or I'll blow up the barricade!"

[…] "Blow up the barricade, then!" said a sergeant. "And yourself with it!"

Marius retorted: "And myself with it" (IV,14,iv,934).

Galvanised by a deadly resolve and a sense of self-sacrifice that transcends the need for personal survival, the phonetically resonant Marius/Issa and their fellows are not playing games as Hugo's more fae-like Gavroche was. Surrounded by his friends and moving as one unit, Issa's revolutionaries begin to reclaim the complicated language used for their predecessors, including the French Revolutionaries of 1793 as described by Hugo:

with their backs to the wall, beside themselves, terrible, half-naked, maces in their fists and a roar in their mouths, they reclaimed that sacred thing, so good and so sweet, Progress. They were savages, yes; but savages of civilization. / They proclaimed justice with fury; though trembling with fear and horror, they wanted to force the human race into paradise. They looked like barbarians yet they were saviours. They reclaimed the light wearing the mask of night (IV,1,v,700).

Hugo describes white revolutionaries with the language of race, appropriating language used in terror to unpick his readers' biases. Ly does the same with costume and location. Issa and his friends are a group of Black and brown boys who wear all-black tracksuits. They

fight in the graffitied halls of their apartment blocks using improvised weapons. Ly uses the stereotype of racialised teen violence and makes his boys righteous not through a change in their behaviour, but in giving them the control of the narrative. For the first time in the film, Issa holds the moral and physical high ground as we look up at him. Issa is holding the only source of light and yet he is obscured by the smoke, the dim lighting, and his protective hood (Figure 6). As we look over the shoulder of the terrified Stéphane, Issa is consumed by the darkness: the barrier of the staircase, the thick smoke from the floors below, the heavy presence of Stéphane and the unyielding walls pressing Issa into this last stand. Blackness here becomes protective: the darkness prevents line of sight and thus keeps Issa safe. The camera cuts between the heavily injured cops on the floor below and the crowd of Black teenagers cramped at the top of the staircase, until we return to Issa's face as he considers the pleading Stéphane. For the first time, Issa's silence holds power: he will not be reasoned with or forced to speak. Issa's features remain as cold and marble-like as Enjolras's on his own barricade: 'His flaring nostrils and downcast eyes gave his implacable Greek profile that expression of fury and of chastity combined that, in the ancient world's view, belonged to justice' (IV,12,viii,915). Issa throws off the association with the plentiful, killable, rodent-like gamin Gavroche (IV,6,ii,787) and instead transcends to heroic status, demanding the world treats his Black, child, humanity with the reverence of a God-like Enjolras.

Figure 6 A shot from LyMis. In a dark corridor, we look up at Issa, wearing a hoodie. Shadow obscures his face. He holds a burning molotov cocktail. We look over the shoulder of a police officer, who is pointing his gun up at Issa.

Behind Issa is graffitied 'J'reve d'avoir une bête de vie' ['I dream of a beast of a life'], which is an adaptation of lyrics from the song *Vory V Zakone* by Lacrim, where the original lyrics are 'J'ai revé d'avoir une bête de vie' [I dreamed of a beast of a life']. As a rap lyric, the simile 'beast of a life' might be translated metaphorically to an English slang equivalent like 'hell of a',[11] but the evocation of the beast in the French also holds a double meaning with the running bestial theme of the film, in which Issa seeks freedom for himself and for the very literal beast, the lion cub, that he saves. This lyric might also echo Boublil and Schönberg's 'I Dreamed a Dream', or the original French concept album's 'J'avais rêvé d'une autre vie', which also carries the imagery of a caged beast:

> J'avais rêvé d'une autre vie [I had dreamed of another life]
>
> mais la vie a tué mes rêves [But life has killed my dreams]
>
> comme on étouffe les derniers cris [As one smothers the last cries]
>
> d'un animal que l'on achève [Of an animal whose life he snuffs out.][12]

Changing the tense of the Lacrim lyric to the present instead of the past in the graffiti ensures that despite the ambiguous fade-to-black ending of the film, Issa remains in the current. Unlike his equivalent dreamer Fantine, Issa's dreams have not yet been fully killed, and there is a way for us to imagine that Issa is not snuffed out in this moment, even as slowly the darkness tightens, a transitional vignette swallowing the world, leaving Issa's face, until we are only left with a black screen.

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[11] The fan translation of the song by user Bored Kid uses 'hell of a life'.
[12] Fan translation by Mme Bahorel.

PART OF THE SYSTEM

Ly presents the three main police characters carefully. Using Wolfgang Iser's theory of reading, Hutcheon asserts that audiences do not simply 'free associate' when given narrative gaps but fill them in 'with the combined guidance of the dramatic set up' (Hutcheon 760). Ly's portrayal of the complexities of policing in his narrative serves as an example of how one can allow audiences to fill crafted absences to perform such sprawling arguments in a film without coming across as overtly didactic. Ly does not have any victim of the police utter abolitionist statements, there are no student protestors or yellow vests with 'ACAB' (All Cops Are Bastards) placards that might turn away a centrist audience on instinct. Instead, the three main police officers at first embody the traditional good cop/bad cop/wild card dynamic of a police procedural, which typically eases us into loving police-aligned characters, until it is gradually made clear that none of these police characters are exempt from being agents of the state, Ly using the stereotypes of the genre against them.

Chris, a working-class white man and most senior in the team is clearly the 'bad cop' of the dynamic, a universally accepted *bad apple*. His colloquial French and inflated ego places him as an archetypical Incompetent Cop: 'corrupt, useless, unnecessarily violent, or just complete douchebags on a power trip' (*TV Tropes,* "Bad Cop/Incompetent Cop"). Placed beside the polite, middle-class officer Stéphane, Chris becomes the poster child for what all audiences can accept is bad policing: Chris flagrantly abuses his power by sexually abusing teenage girls of colour at a bus stop [0:19:48], gleefully putting pre-teen Black boys in chokeholds [0:40:35] and delights in collecting pig memorabilia as he turns his nickname from insult into trophy [0:08:24]. As Brombert notes, this 'hauntingly present' laughter is very Hugo, a 'signal of antagonism and hatred […] the laughter of cruelty: the grimace. And

behind the grimace can be read a deeper anxiety: the latent fear of a dehumanizing fall from grace' (Brombert 236).

Chris' second-in-command Gwada is a Black Muslim man from the banlieue he now polices. Despite being visibly uncomfortable with Chris's behaviour and giving the man small, smiling shakes of his head to show his distaste at his behaviour, Gwada is not willing to break the bonds of his cop-brotherhood by stopping his superior until the decision affects his own life. Stéphane, new to the area and appalled at his new partners' willing complacency is at first presented to us as a sympathetic 'good' cop: actively calling out his fellow officers' behaviour and attempting to police the neighbourhood in a less destructive manner than he is instructed to do by Chris. Ly capitalises on the false equivalence of Chris and Gwada's being working class and thus allegedly less intelligent to create a caricature of simple, morally bankrupt characters to set the 'intellectual' Stéphane against. Stéphane wholeheartedly believes in the dichotomy of a good cop/bad cop dynamic, and in his inherent superiority as someone with more education. When probing Gwada, Stéphane says:

> "You're sorry? What are you sorry for? Did you tell [Issa] you were sorry? No, you acted like Chris. We never apologize, right? Let me tell you something. Today was the worst day of my life. I've been with you two less than 24 hours. You and that idiot Chris. You are majorly screwing up." [1:21:01]

Stéphane begins the conversation by setting himself up as a father in comparison to the now child-like Gwada, ensuring a sense of paternalistic reverence and creating a foothold as he tries to replace Chris as Gwada's mentor. Stéphane then sets a clear boundary between what he deems unacceptable, 'that idiot' Chris's style of policing, and his own. He attempts

to create a softer transition of power from Chris to himself, playing on both his and the audience's belief that to do so is both the best and the easiest option: to lay the blame on the clearly *bad,* singular cop, Chris. Gwada surprises both us and Stéphane when he rejects this transfer of power. Gwada cannot accept the simplistic narrative because he understands, unlike Stéphane, that the issue is a communal, not individual, one.

> GWADA: So you just got here and you're giving us lessons? Hm? If we weren't like that, they'd eat us alive. […] We're the only ones they somewhat respect.
> STÉPHANE: What respect? They are afraid of you.
> GWADA: I grew up here, too. You just got here, but we've been here for ten years. This is our life. [1:21:21]

Gwada will not betray his cop brotherhood because he is an established part of the institution. While we have come to believe, through Stéphane's eyes, that Gwada is a victim of the institution, kept in an abusive relationship by the bad cop Chris, Gwada reveals he is very aware of the part he plays. Being from Montfermeil, Gwada does not believe that the socioeconomic environment can or will change: if it has not done so between Hugo's time until now, he cannot see that development happen in his own lifetime. Knowing this, Gwada has chosen to take the side of those with power, hoping that in doing so he is elevating himself. We see this in the life of Javert, who 'noticed that society kept at bay two classes of men, those who attack it and those who guard it; his only choice was between those two classes' (I,5,v,144). Gwada clearly has some of Javert's 'basic rigidity, steadiness, honesty,' and, like Javert, this is 'clouded by an inexpressible hatred for that race of bohemians to who he belonged. He joined the police. He did well there' (144). Having made his choice as Javert did, Gwada cannot now unpick his beliefs from those of the establishment, his

despair at the unchanging nature of society merging with the reliance on aggressive policing; this being the simpler option than attempting to enact institutional reform across interlinking health, education, defence and immigration policies.

Stéphane begins to understand in this conversation that he can no longer rely on holding a moral superiority as the 'good cop' he believes he has been. Even while disobeying Chris's orders by being what he terms 'polite', Stéphane does not betray his allyship to the police force, admitting to spinning a falsified account of his partners' actions to convince community-leader Salah to their side. At the climax of the film, Stéphane ultimately pulls his gun on Issa, who he has been purporting to protect throughout. As much as Stéphane thinks he is on the side of 'the people', he does not renounce his fellow officers, nor does he report their actions, upholding the power of the police until ultimately following the advice the chief of police threatened Stéphane with on his first day: 'There's no team without cohesion. And without a team, you're alone.' [0:09:00] As Ly explains in an interview, his point is not to individualise the actions of a single officer but to criticise the entire institution:

> Most of the police are young people badly trained, badly educated. They are thrown into these difficult situations in the neighborhoods, and because of their lack of training, it's very easy for them to panic. A lot of them when they panic, they pull the trigger. It's not their personal fault, it's the system, the way they are "untrained" to end up doing what they are doing (Walsh, *WSWS*).

By inlaying this commentary, *LyMis* turns against a 'touchstone' in *LM* adaptations where Javert becomes the villain which deprives 'the novel of its dynamite, to point the finger at a single policeman' (Robb 1998, 381) rather than 'the entire legal and societal structure of

nineteenth-century France' (Beaghton 148). When contemplating his suicide, Hugo's Javert

drafts a list of 'observations' for the betterment of the police service (V,4,i,1086-7), but we

are never privy to whether these notes reach the administration they are addressed to, nor

whether this letter changes the state of policing. Javert's death thus has no permanent

effect on the legal system of Paris in *LM*'s narrative, de-centralising the idea that it is an

individual tyrannical officer's fault that injustice at the hands of the police happens, or that

one 'good cop' can single-handedly fix the situation. As Grossman argues, the preface to *LM*

'situates the book at the center of a dialectic between the historical persistence of

institutionalized hell and the advent of an age where his vision of a better world would be

obsolete' (Grossman 1994, 5). In the same way, Ly turns the audience's eye towards the real

institutions of power that promote and uphold police brutality in the first place: the people

above both the citizens and the officers, the creators of the laws who would not deign to set

foot in Montfermeil, as well as the communities that band together to protect their own. In

doing so, Ly refuses to acknowledge the role of a white-saviour figure in the film. Ly

condemns not just those who are wilfully ignorant but those who are simply performative in

their dedication to social justice, do-gooder outsiders causing ineffective (and thus harmful)

political activism. As he states in another interview: "We don't feel it's enough to go in the

streets every Saturday – if you really want to make a revolution, you have to be in the

streets every day" (King, *Awards Watch*). As Hjort notes in her analysis of white

documentarians' reliance on 'smug' and 'performative' films that do not commit 'effective

actions or decision making' despite being what one would hope was a 'change- and justice-

orientated' profession, there is an over-saturation of typically white, outsider perspectives

in activism-filmmaking. Ly's casting of children from his own community (including his own

son as Buzz), and the refusal to place Stéphane as a 'good cop'/saviour refute the colonial

assumption that Black, Arab and North African communities are in need of saving, typically from themselves, and especially by a singular, 'good' white hero.

US AND THEM

Salah, a local community leader, holds enough experience and local clout that he can act on behalf of Issa to force the policemen to listen to him. Salah is vaguely paralleled with both Valjean through his commitments to community kindness and being 'honourable and honoured' (I,7,iii,195) and with Bishop Myriel, whose protection of Valjean after his stealing the candlesticks (I,2,xiii,94) mirrors how Salah positions himself as being on Issa's side in the theft of the lion. If Chris becomes Thénardier, Buzz (the young Black boy who has recorded Gwada shooting Issa), becomes Cosette: young, innocent and in need of protecting from the violent and antagonistic Thénardier. The stand-off in Salah's café imitates Valjean's arrival at Thénardier's inn in Montfermeil to steal away the abused Cosette, Ly playing with audience expectation, rejecting the easy parallel of Salah-as-Thénardier (falling into well-used filmic Islamophobic tropes) and instead upholding the narrative that here it is the white policeman who is the clear antagonist. As Hugo makes the link between God and support for the previously incarcerated, Ly makes a similar link through Salah who tells us the importance of the lion to Islam and praising the thief releasing the animal from enforced captivity as an agent of freedom. When Stéphane tells Salah that Issa must return the stolen lion-cub to its 'owner' so that it can be fed, Salah replies:

> "Since when are men supposed to feed lions? Don't they know how to hunt? And feed themselves? Men invent limitations where there is none. It's called servitude. Do you know what lions say when they roar? Oh Allah. Please keep me from

attacking someone charitable." [0:37:00]

Though Salah's words to Stéphane are about the very real lion Issa has stolen, Stéphane understands that both this conversation and the language his police officer partners have used to describe Salah echo that of a lion's cage: that Salah will 'eat [Stéphane] alive' if let free, and that Salah, Issa and the community around them are the threat of a currently-enslaved creature who will once again regain their ability to hunt their (righteous) revenge.

The film's hand-held camera, again matching the documentary-style of the film, shakes to match Stéphane's nervous eyes, and Ly keeps Stéphane central in a mid-shot, only flicking occasionally to Salah, withholding our ability to read Salah's expression for signs of safety. The panes of the window-front to the café and the panelled, metal interior design create the image of cage bars, which continue around behind Salah in the form of the segmented menu and the stake holding the döner kebab. Stéphane paces nervously around the café, suddenly aware that he has set foot in the cage of a lion he has incarcerated, warily watching those who watch him, swinging his attention between Salah and his path to the exit: a parallel of the lion's cage Issa is forced into later in the film (Figure 7; 8). In this exchange between Stéphane and Salah, Ly demands that divine associations with God are not solely rooted in white, police establishment but in the Black, Muslim community group too, redistributing the power that divine authority gives. Despite Stéphane's physical fear, this taking of power is not a violent one, and the use of slavery and incarceration vocabulary prevents the 'polite' white officer from performing a rebuttal and thus risk losing his status as 'good'.

Figure 7 A shot from LyMis. Salah, a Black man with a bald head and thick beard, wearing a grey Qandoura, stands in front of a Kebab shop menu board. A döner kebab is on a spit behind him. There are golden vertical lines behind him on the menu, the spit, and the restaurant structure. We look over Stéphane's shoulder.

Figure 8 A shot from LyMis. In a circus cage lined with gold bars, Issa is being dragged before a male lion, who snarls at him.

In his chapter 'The Dead are Right but the Living are Not Wrong', Hugo meanders towards his point in a way Ly, as a Black man who grew up in Montfermeil, does not. Hugo plays devil's advocate by hearing out the opinion of a fearful, anti-protest citizen:

Fear excuses such terrible inhospitality; it merges with alarm, an extenuating circumstance. Sometimes, and this has been seen, fear even becomes a passion [...] "What do these [revolutionaries] want? They're never satisfied. They compromise men of peace. As if we haven't had enough revolutions as it is! What have they come here for? Let them get themselves out of it. Too bad for them. It's nothing to do with us. [...] They're a bunch of vermin" (V,1,xx,1013).

Hugo has sympathy for this hypothetical fearful citizen, admitting their ingratitude towards

the progress of the human race but ultimately exonerating them from any blame or

responsibility. While Hugo's novel defends the right to insurrection and attempts to distance

the reader from the opinion that barricades are 'the work of terrorists' (1015), *LM*

ultimately falls on the side of non-violence: 'The best thing, of course, is the peaceful

solution. […] No violent remedy is necessary. Study evil amicably, note it, then cure it. That

is what we urge society to do' (V,1,xx,1015). In a moment of life imitating art, a comment on

one of Ly's interviews parallels Hugo's hypothetical fearful citizen:

> The main boy in the movie, Issa, is a jerk. […] we're supposed to feel sorry for him
>
> when [he] leads the thuggish Antifa-type attack on the three policemen at the end
>
> […] Maybe the people in this area need to look in the mirror. Of course, France
>
> threw off all its Christian heritage in the 1700s, so now all it has are a bunch of
>
> godless secular and leftist political solutions. France reaps what is has sown. And, to
>
> blame colonialism on the plight of today's Africans just seems stupid. Maybe Africans
>
> need to get rid of the Islamism and pagan tribalism that's harmed their world and
>
> adopt Christian capitalism (Obenson, *Indie Wire,* #Comments).

The fearful citizen here is so caught up in their individual fear that they are reduced to

concluding that the 'bunch of vermin' are to blame for the institutional injustices committed

against them, continuing to extol the virtues of Christian missionary colonialism while

claiming that colonialism is anachronistic. Citizen parrots the Trumpian hatred of the

mythical 'Antifa' army, likely unintentionally labelling the police as the fascists the 'anti-fa'

refers to. Citizen labels the pre-teen Issa a 'thuggish' 'jerk', clearly unsympathetic to the

child despite the film documenting his oppression. The Citizen's comment shares the same

overarching sentiment as Hugo, namely that if 'society' truly wished for a solution, it would not react with (thuggish) 'political solutions' like violence but instead self-education: as if the responsibility for change lies with the oppressed and not the oppressor.

Ly's anti-institutional, pro-violence stance is less stoic than Hugo's novel. Hugo's own personal history with revolution is, in its most basic descriptor, complex. 'Unlike writers who start out as revolutionaries and end up as reactionaries, [Hugo], as a young man, was a monarchist, a Bourbon, and a *Vendéen*, like his mother, then an Orleanist during the reign of Louis-Philippe' (Llosa 107). When describing Hugo's diary entries for the real June 1832, in which the 'tax-paying, property-owning father of four' was a mere observer of the rebellion, Robb states they act as a 'perfect example of the over-cautious policies which Hugo derides in *Les Misérables*, where the 1832 uprising is seen as one of the great hinges of modern history' (Robb 1998, 173-4). A later, 'less cowardly piece on the subject was redated to make it look as though it was written immediately after the rebellion. And even then, the main objection to the Government's clumsy concessions and repressions made him sound like an irritable bourgeois sitting up in bed to write to his *député*' (Robb 1998, 174). Then, in June 1848, Hugo 'went far beyond his remit from the Asemblée Nationale' (270). As Peer of France, 'Hugo harangued insurgents, stormed barricades, took prisoners, directed troops and cannon, and unexpectedly remained alive. This means that he was directly responsible for the deaths of untold numbers of workers' (275). Robb posits that should Hugo have been killed then 'with a well-aimed bullet, the final image […] would have been Victor Hugo leading a murderous assault on the people' (277). By 1852 and Napoleon's *coup d'état,* Hugo 'agrees to lead the revolt: "As soon as the first barricade goes up, I wish to be behind it."' (299). In later years he was 'a liberal and a republican, and, at the time of the Commune, he articulated somewhat hazy socialist and anarchist ideas (Llosa 107). The use

of 'somewhat hazy' is a common descriptor used for Hugo's writing, especially regarding

LM:

> Without concurring with Pierre Barbéris' denunciation of Hugo's deep-seated
>
> complicity with the bourgeois social order, one must admit that Hugo's revolutionary
>
> rhetoric often camouflages the latent yearnings of an *homme d'ordre*. Or rather,
>
> revolution itself, in Hugo's private ideology, is made to serve the demands for
>
> stability and continuity (Brombert 136).

Brombert names this as a 'revealing unwillingness' on Hugo's part to understand revolution

in relation to class warfare, even at a time in the author's life when he 'claimed to have

been converted [to the] virtues of socialism' (136). On one side, Bellos notes, *LM* 'states

quite clearly that "the bourgeoisie" does not exist and that "class warfare" is a nefarious

idea; on the other, it makes heroes out of young men who want to change society by violent

means. Where, then, does the novel really hang on the great washing-line of political

convictions stretching from the far left to the far right?' (Bellos 188). When comparing

American and French adaptations of *LM*, Gleizes states wryly that the way the barricades

episode is treated in American adaptations 'can certainly raise a smile at times. [...] Hugo's

evocation of the socio-political motivations that govern the insurrection is but a distant

memory' (Gleizes 137), yet Llosa believes that a defect of the novel is that *LM* simplifies and

reduces the June 1832 revolution:

> By erasing the differences and specific aims of each group and by doing away with
>
> the concrete ideological pre-occupations of each of the sectors that had come
>
> together on the barricade [...] by substituting concrete political problems with an
>
> emotional moral protest against the current unjust reality [... the narrator]

110

transformed history into fiction (Llosa 142).

Using Sartre's *Temps Modernes,* Brombert sets out the function and responsibility of writers: 'fundamentally, the writer must give society an uneasy conscience (*conscience malheureuse*) and will therefore clash with all conservative forces' (Brombert 4). Can a novel whose political intent is called 'hazy' truly give society an uneasy conscience? Especially one who has been read and enjoyed by both Confederate and Union soldiers (Grossman 2016, 117), and been used in conjunction with both the Obama and Trump political campaigns (Stephens 2019, 3)?

Figure 9 A poster that reads: Choosing to "stay out of politics" and social Justice issues is white privilege. You have the ability to ignore oppression only because you aren't facing it or being forced to address it like other races. A cartoon man of ambiguous ethnicity points outwards towards the reader.

Ly does not have the luxury to petition for a non-violent solution as Hugo feels he has. While Ly calls himself and his neighbours in Montfermeil 'the wretched, [who] must rebel against a system that continues to oppress and exploit them' (Obenson, *IndieWire*), Hugo encourages 'the vanguards of the human race', those who would start an uprising in

the name of progress, not to give too frigid a cold shoulder to the 'Everyman' who does not

wish to 'shorten its passage for the generations to come, who are its equals, after all'

(V,1,xx,1014). This attitude is a privileged position to be in. As one (unattributed) graphic

from the Black Lives Matter movement reads: 'Choosing to "stay out of politics" and social

justice issues IS white privilege – you have the ability to ignore oppression – only because

you aren't facing it or being forced to address it like other races' (Figure 9). Hugo is able to

posit and stand by this Everyman's political non-action because for him (and the Everyman

styled on his own identity (*Choses Vues* 42-7)), 'politics' can be a choice. During the Siege of

Paris, Hugo's family did not starve as the poor of Paris did because he was donated the

exotic meat of the *Jardin de Plantes;* compared to most, Hugo 'had had a good siege' (Robb

1998, 456-7). He chose to donate large sums of money to the poor, and could afford to

leave France when his life was threatened, as it was throughout his life.

Hugo dedicates Part 4 Book 10 of *LM* to his definition of insurrection and riot,

qualifying when the 'right' time to protest is, what this looked like, and how moral each

scenario is. As a person who can afford to choose when these definitions come into play, he

carries similar, definitive authority to Stéphane:

> SALAH: What if they're right to be angry? That's the only way to be heard nowadays!
>
> STÉPHANE: But remember, in 2005, what did their anger do? Nothing. They burned
>
> cars. They destroyed bus stops, and what's left? Signs? Not even benches to sit on.
>
> There's nothing left. It did you a disservice. And what's worse, nobody cares.
>
> [1:04:51]

Stéphane is able to speak from the voice of white, institutional authority when he claims

that 'nobody cares', talking from his position of power where there is a clear 'you' and thus

an 'us'. This performative speech, which appeals to Salah's desire not to see his community

burn, is effective in that it does exactly what Salah fears: it silences legitimate anger under

falsely calming words and allows a reversion of power back to the white authority.

Stéphane, like Hugo, bends the reality of the world in line with his word, deciding what he

believes is right and wrong. This speech ultimately wins Salah's trust, which is then

immediately abused by Stéphane who lies about his intentions, about his cop partners'

actions and about the resolution he can bring. In deciding to wrestle the power back from

Salah, Stéphane *chooses* to side with white state violence, finally accepting his place on side

against the 'them'. No doubt used to media portrayals of Muslim people in cop dramas,

namely as insidious terrorists (Shaheen 172), an audience witnesses the clear reversal of

tropes in this scene, where the cop disguises his institution's 'accidental' use of a weapon on

a child to a distraught and emotional member of the community. In doing so, Ly puts focus

on Hugo and Stéphane's *linguistic* ability to delineate as political power, naming this as a

weapon of state as powerful as Gwada's gun or Chris's physical abuse.

LY COLONISING HUGO

While Ly has not made a direct adaptation of Hugo's *LM*, he uses Hugo's title and internal

references to lend Eurocentric credibility to his anarchistic, diasporic message. As Judith

Buchanan charts, film has sought cultural respectability in borrowing 'not only of

Shakespeare but also of the Bible, Dickens, Racine, Pushkin, Thackeray and other literary

figures of comparable cultural "weight"' from its very beginnings (Buchanan 17). Griffiths,

Stephens and Watts concur when they argue that canonical literature was popular at the

dawn of silent film 'when filmmakers sought to legitimize the new art form […] both

culturally and financially' (127). By associating his film with Hugo's novel, thus 'affording a new text authenticity' (Cartmell and Whelehan 8), Ly reaches a potential audience that would not afford the same interest to the same film presented without the same title. Ly re-appropriates French culture, manipulating the hierarchy of Great White Men to his own favour by purposefully playing with Hugo's words, refusing to make a one for one adaptation that might undermine Ly's ability to claim authority and artistic ability while still capitalising from the audience pull of the name.

Stam argues that much of adaptation theory has focused on 'lamenting what had been "lost" in the transition from novel to film, while ignoring what had been "gained"' (Stam 2019, 66), especially when there is focus on subjective *quality* rather than on *analytical* productivity of adaptations. An example he uses is Patricia Rozema's *Mansfield Park,* filtered through Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism:*

> The adaptation can be productively seen within the context of two debates which were centuries apart, i.e. the debates about slavery at the time of the novel's production, and those about reparations at the time of the film's release. The adaptation simply "unsilences" the critique of slavery elided in the novel, where Fanny's question about the slave trade remains unanswered (Stam 2019, 47).

This 'unsilencing' of a text is crucial. Like Stam I believe that we can use our contemporary voice and knowledge to answer questions that went un-answered, or to hold texts to accountability they did not face; the adaptation now keeping the source relevant to the current in its criticism of contemporary social divides. As Stephens argues, adaptations:

> throw into sharper relief questions about how a text has been perceived, from which

angles, and to what ends. In turn, they implicitly point to what the nominal source

text itself does with gender and other markers of identity such as ethnicity,

nationality, sexuality, and disability (2019, 6).

To not adapt with a conscious critical eye on what has been silenced is to be wilfully

ignorant and to actively prioritise whiteness. By specifying the Black, Muslim bodies affected

by the colonial legacies of France, Ly unsilences the link that binds nineteenth-century

literature with present-day policing. It is not simply that we are seeing echoes of the

injustice of nineteenth-century France as represented in *LyMis.* More, we witness how the

legacies of French colonialism still affect contemporary life, where white supremacy and

immigration laws affect housing, policing, and education in what Adam Elliot-Cooper calls

'colonial policing coming home' ("Colonialism, Race & Policing"). Hugo himself makes the

link between police brutality and the gamin of the nineteenth century by referencing Louis

XIV's using the police to kidnap children for use as galley slaves, stating that Jean-Baptiste

'Colbert made sure as many galley slaves as possible were churned out by provincial

intendants and the parliaments' (III,1,vi,483). Colbert was the intendant of Finances that

oversaw the French East India Company and drafted the Code Noir, which was described as

being:

> one of the most extensive official documents on race, slavery and freedom ever
>
> drawn up in Europe […] represent[ing] one of the first major examples of the conflict
>
> between legal equality and racial discrimination that would prove a key determinant
>
> of black life in France (Stovall 2006, 205).

Hugo uses the term galley slave to refer to predominantly white, French men who had been

incarcerated, but as we saw in Chapter One, there is one Black man in the chain gang

Valjean watches with Cosette 'who had once, perhaps, been a slave' (IV,3,viii,747). We can

unsilence the legacy of structural inequality as enforced in Hugo by the police on the (white)

gamin and the (white) galley slave by naming these police as the same enforcers of the Code

Noir against free and enslaved Black people arriving in France, which we then track to the

present situation of North and West African and Arab immigrants in France.[13] The very same

policies that affected Valjean and Gavroche in the context of the galley slave now affect Issa,

Buzz, Salah and Gwada.

To go a step further, we then destabilise how these 'legacies' are conceptualised. As

part of his own decolonial practise, Stam argues that while the Eurocentric ideal of the novel

is envisioned as a Western product exported out, with the retroactive claiming of biblical

Hebraism and classical Hellenism becoming part of the 'Western' canon of narrative, an

alternate approach is to view the foundational Greek epics and Jewish bible as works rooted

in the Mesopotamian, Canaan, Semitic, Phoenician, Egyptian and Ethiopian cultures, and

thus not part of what Arjun Appadurai calls the 'Eurochronology' (Stam 2019, 17). Given

that Hugo was deeply inspired by both Homeric epic and Biblical verse, how would our

critical language change if we did not give the white French author the hierarchy of

'originality' (as in the question of whether Ly owes his success to Hugo) but rather the

language of requisition or re-appropriation? Watts argues that Hugo did not 'restrict himself

merely to piling up references to other texts, authors, or cultural media' but, like a sculptor,

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[13] Gleizes states that another 'meaning of *forçat* (convict or slave) conjures an anachronistic image of the galleys, a penal system that was replaced in France in 1748 with prison labor, as it figures in Hugo's novel. Nevertheless,' adaptations like the current Stage show and Hooper's 2012 film 'continue to depict shackled galley slaves maneuvering heavy oars. [...] This prevalent choice of historical representation in the American adaptations confirms a rather loose relationship with the story's actual socio-historical context. It is, however, not unreasonable to consider that this choice is fully conscious', connecting these French prisoners with African Americans and their 'struggle for the recognition of their rights' (Gleizes 141).

promoted 'creativity as an act of cropping and refining those materials already present in the artistic landscape and honing them into an entirely new creation' (Watts 135). Similarly, Yee states that while nineteenth-century French culture was a 'great exporting powerhouse', it also 'imported *from* marginalized cultures' (Yee 2008, 3, emphasis hers). In decolonising our perception of western inspiration, we can see Ly (and other non-white adaptors of Hugo) not as 'borrowing' Hugo's text but as reclaiming possession over stolen relics, repatriating yet more looting done through colonisation.

As an example, Yee states simply, 'stories about the Orient contain lions' (2016, 114). We can see Issa's attempts to free a lion cub from its confines in France as Ly's journey to reclaim and repatriate an Oriental trope from the hands of Orientalist writer Hugo. Though Issa is ultimately unsuccessful, white, French authority is challenged on what it means to 'keep' the lion: Salah tells Stéphane that the lion roars "Oh Allah", transforming the previously French lion not just into a diasporic foreign national but into a Muslim one, challenging the perhaps more dominant cultural use of the lion as representing Western, Christian heraldry. As Prasad argues, the colonisation of Algeria was ordered to 'elevate a sense of national pride, and to distract an unhappy French public' (Prasad 10). *LyMis* complicates the idea of who is now considered the 'French public', and what national pride means to the colonised. Ly gives revolutionary spirit, a fundamentally French national concept, not to the white men who consider themselves 'French', but to those treated apart from the nation. Instead of considering how Ly 'translates' Hugo to the contemporary, we instead ask how Hugo appropriated Blackness in *his* work. We then focus on where *LM* and its anti-abolishment sentiment took from Black peoples, adapting Black voices for use in his novel. Ly's film becomes not the adaptation but closer to the 'original text', where this

original text is the shared source of inspiration for both Hugo and Ly: the exploitation of

Black peoples and those from the 'Orient' under colonialism.

CONCLUSION

The multi-ethnic community of the banlieue is not perfect. There is a deep-seated racism

between the Rromani and Black communities, both sides exchanging slurs as they gear up to

fight, clearly distrusting the other to the point of violence. The Mayor, a Black man who

claims he is standing up for the community is beaten up by the protestors as he is branded a

'sellout' for helping the police. Buzz, the young Black boy whose drone caught the footage

of police brutality was at first using the drone to spy on neighbourhood girls getting changed

through their windows. The Claw, the Arab businessman who eventually facilitates trade

between the police and Salah only does so because he wants to avoid rioting: "do you think

it's good for my business?". Ly's argument is not that the banlieue is perfect nor lacking in

corruption or greed, where innocents must be saved from destruction, but that if there is no

'perfect' or 'polite' behaviour that can cause change, how can the white police (and the

establishment they protect) not expect a violent form of retribution.

Ly repeats in interviews about the film that he would not be surprised if, in twenty

years another filmmaker made their debut with a film adaptation of *LM* because, while he

has hope in the ability to change the future, the novel remains relevant to today's injustices.

Indeed, little seems to have changed from what was documented in *La Haine* in the 1990s

despite both films' direct line to governmental bodies. Despite this pessimism, Ly's intent is

summarised in the title card he ends the film with:

Mes amis, retenez bien ceci,

il n'y a ni mauvaises herbes, ni mauvais hommes.

Il n'y a que de mauvais cultivateurs.

[*My friends, remember this:*

There is no such thing as a weed and no such thing as a bad man.

There are only bad cultivators] (I,5,iii,139).

In using himself as example, Ly surrounds the film with calls to action for his audience. Ly lures a complacent audience in by promising them a story they are familiar with: French nationalistic pride in football celebrations and martyrs dying by the hand of a corrupt government, but instead gives them a film that stands firmly with the young people taking a pro-violence stance against state-sanctioned police brutality. While the film is open-ended, Issa finishes the film with both the moral and physical higher ground. The simple fact that Issa does not end the film as another dead Black boy at the hands of police champions his cause: unlike Hugo, Ly argues that we can fight injustice and have the potential to survive.

PART TWO: BBCMIS AND 'DIVERSE' CONTENT

Les Misérables (hereafter referred to as *BBCMis*) is a six-episode miniseries written by Andrew Davies and directed by Tom Shankland. Produced by the BBC with PBS, it ran between 2018 and 2019. In a simultaneously Oedipally envious and worshipful way (Hutcheon 7), in his press tour, Davies stated that he was a defender of Hugo's text, and that he saw it his duty to 'rescue' *LM* 'from the clutches of that awful musical with its doggerel lyrics' (Lawrence, *The Telegraph*). 'We have explored all that', Davies claimed, 'We've done it properly' (Drury, *The Guardian*). In comparison to *Owarinaki* and *LyMis*,

Davies' *BBCMis* is certainly the most direct attempt at an adaptation of Hugo's novel.

Despite his dogged claim to faithfulness, Davies also mentions in several interviews how he

disregarded the text where he saw fit: 'I did slightly want to rescue Hugo from himself' he

says, most often referencing the amount of coincidences in the novel, what he saw as

Cosette and Fantine's female weakness and Javert and Valjean's (deviant) sexuality (Hughes,

i). This divergence from Hugo's use of coincidence is key. Hugo's novel makes clear the role

of fate in the lives of the characters: from Javert's continued posting at Valjean's side to the

Thénardier family's ins and outs from Valjean's life, continual cycles of coincidence

metamorphize into the role of the divine. As Llosa states, chance is not 'an accident,

something unforeseen and exceptional, a break with normality', but something that

'continually affects the lives of the characters' (35). Davies argues that in a script for a

drama, this reliance on the invisible hand of fate becomes more interesting when it is an

active choice. I will argue that in personalising the decisions that Hugo allows his audience

to suspend our disbelief about, Davies and the BBC production team often leave the

audience to make assumptions about a character's motivations by visual difference alone.

With this death of fate comes the rise of in-world racism. In its 'colour-blind' casting, the

BBC production is not the damning criticism of contemporary social inequality Davies claims

it to be, and the production's realities undermine its stated intent.

THE INDIVIDUAL

Hugo's Enjolras is very much a man who founds himself on taking 'fraternity, liberty,

equality or death' to its conclusion. He strives for complete depersonalisation, to the point

where their leadership model becomes a trifecta (Enjolras-Combeferre-Courfeyrac) in which

Enjolras' lack of humanity (here used not derogatorily but as statement of fact) is

counterbalanced by his fellows (II,4,i,537). In doing so, Hugo makes his case:

> No single human individual, unaided, can achieve grace; this feat requires the
> example and encouragement of others, living and dead. [...] no isolated individual
> can permanently transform society; and no single generation can definitively
> implement social justice' (Porter 50).

Davies' Enjolras has very few lines, but in what lines he has he makes it clear to his group of friends that this plot for revolution is not a desire to overturn oppressive inequalities but 'where we can take our place in history' (Davies "Episode Five" 5), suggesting a quest for individual valour rather than collective freedom. In some way Davies has created a very realistic image in this group of cisgender, middle-class, straight, majority-white boys, whose goal is not community progress but individual legacy. Amongst this group of revolutionaries, none seem particularly interested in joining a revolution, including the only other recurring, named Ami of the show, Courfeyrac, played by Archie Madekwe, a mixed-race Black man. Courfeyrac exists to be educated by the white Enjolras (as played by Joseph Quinn), and to debauch Marius (Josh O'Connor) by dragging him to local club *La Chaumière.* Also amongst the group hoping to 'be free' is one un-named, dark-skinned Black man with no lines (Figure 10), who disappears once the group has thinned to its core members. The prominence given in the novel to the community of named insurgents is rerouted to giving Grantaire more airtime despite his role infamously being the group's most vocal critic of revolution (III,4,iv,550; IV,1,vi,702). When public dissent is on the rise, it is not the Amis who stoke thought of revolt but a group of workers who share the same café. The workers appear fearless as they sing a unionising song (Figure 11), while Courfeyrac and Grantaire watch them, clearly terrified and unwilling to join in.

Figure 10 A shot from BBCMIS. A group of young men sit in a dark café. Eight are white men, two are Black. As they sit around a table, they curve inwards, posture unsure.

Figure 11 A shot from BBCMIS. In a darkly lit café, a group of working-class white people drink and sing, some holding their arms up in protest. They hold their bodies upright, backs straight and confident.

Once these boys have (reluctantly) built the barricade and they are on their last legs, Enjolras offers the people of the barricade the chance to flee. A Black man (Mwanza Goutier) named Worker Revolutionary in the script but given the name 'Daniel' in the show, scoffs at this, rallying the barricade's spirits by exclaiming 'Let's raise the barricade higher, and fight till the last man!' (Davies "Episode Six" 3). He is cut off by Enjolras and Marius who tag team to undermine this morale boost with a speech about leaving the barricade, ending with a 'I command you', 'I entreat you' (Davies "Episode Six" 4). The members of the barricade including Daniel deflate and gradually the barricade thins out, including the leader

of the workers, Despiat. Daniel, previously willing to fight to the death to protest structural inequality, is undercut by two white men, one of whom is fighting 'to be part of history' and the other who is on a suicide mission because his girlfriend of two days is moving to England and is 'more circumstantially than ideologically' tied to the cause (Roche 155). While the novel's Marius 'arrives on the scene a ready-made rabble rouser', his backstory giving way to become an 'instantly heroic figure' on the barricades (Grossman and Stephens 2017, 389) Hugo dedicates time to show the other Amis' process of revolution, evidencing the clear thought and motivation that drives each member to lend their support to ending inequality. The *BBCMis'* Enjolras and Marius are both heralded as the leaders of the revolution despite contributing almost nothing in either the lead-up to the revolt or on the barricade itself: ineffectual, selfish men only interested in performing self-aggrandising gestures in displays of, but not effective means of, support.

This glorification of the white male protestor is conspicuous when we consider the contemporary environment evoked by the term 'protest'. The first scene of *BBCMis'* protest begins with an aerial shot of the mass of protestors stood facing the neat ranks of soldiers on horseback. There is a gunshot, then the lines of cavaliers burrow into the body of the crowd. A year after this scene was shown on the BBC, a line of policemen on horseback rode into a crowd of majority-Black people protesting police brutality in London. It is not hard to see these two images and to create parallels between them, from the superficial visual imagery of the raised position of the camera following a line of officers on horseback riding into a crowd of protesters, to the equivalencies of the crowds protesting discrimination (Figure 12). Considering how the BBC has stated that its staff cannot attend Black Lives Matter protests to protect their 'impartiality' (Waterson, *The Guardian*), the producing team

might have cut this scene from broadcast if the show had aired in the winter of 2020

instead, lest the shot be taken for a parallel to the behaviour of the Metropolitan police.
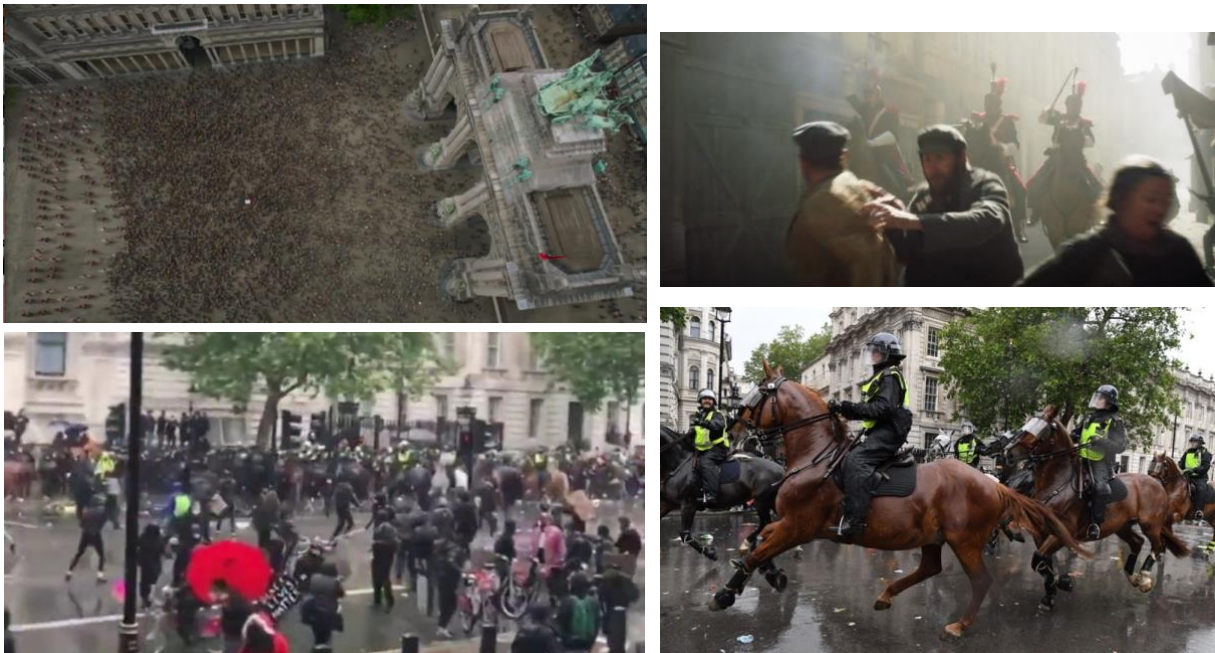

Figure 12 Four images, two are shots from BBCMIS, two are photographs from Black Lives Matter protests in London 2021. The first image is a drone shot from BBCMIS. It shows a crowd of protestors being faced with four ranks of cavaliers. Two lines of the cavaliers push into the crowd. In the second image, a street of protestors in London face a rank of horse-mounted police officers. One blurry sign reads Black Lives Matter. In the third image, a shot from BBCMIS, three worker-protestors run as cavaliers charge at them, sabres raised in attack. In the fourth image, horse-mounted police officers charge through a London street in riot gear.

While it may seem innocuous for a production company to take an apparently

impartial stance, the BBC, being one of the greatest cultural institutions in the world, holds

more political power than they often pretend. Kate Griffiths states that the BBC, which

offers 'an unparalleled range and scope of works' and as the most prolific producer of

adaptations in the world, unequivocally holds a historic and well-documented position as a

dominant Lefeverian patron (Griffiths 127). Patrons as described by Lefevere are persons or

groups who:

> try to regulate the relationship between the literary system and other systems
>
> which, together, make up a society, a culture. As a rule they operate by means of
>
> institutions set up to regulate, if not the writing of literature, at least its distribution
>
> (Lefevere 1992, 15).

These institutions enforce the standards that dictate 'the needs and ideology' of the target audience while adapting a source text. These rewrites are 'frequently [exercises] in which politics [have] a hand' (Griffiths 125). By commissioning both original and adapted drama, the BBC both establishes canon and influences and alters what 'canonical' comes to mean, shaping what audiences and production companies consider poetic *and* authentic. In not overtly supporting Black Lives Matter protestors, the BBC have made evident the standard of unconscious bias inherent to institutions like the BBC. When the BBC, the grand patron and well-established benchmark of artistic integrity confirms that Black lives do not matter as much as white comfort, this becomes the dominant ideology of an audience. While outwardly asserting impartiality, the BBC has instead shifted the political needle on a global scale. It was thus most likely a conscious decision to cast white actors for the majority of the Amis alongside three ineffective Black men (one who disappears, one who is bloodthirsty and one who is reluctant) because the imagery of a group of tragic (but ultimately just) Black protagonists being persecuted by the police might imply the BBC's *taking a side* on whether police brutality disproportionately affects Black and brown people.

Griffiths notes that in a similar way, the BBC's adaptation of *Germinal* anticipated 'in unnerving ways, the miners' strikes of 1972 and 1974, resonating with the tensions visible in the industry at the time of its making in 1970'. Because of the BBC's politics of neutrality, the *Germinal* adaptation concluded with the protesting miners returning to work on the same terms as they left, 'after a strike which has left them depleted, damaged and more downtrodden than ever'. As such the parting words (intended in the novel to give hope to a future, successful social revolution) rang as distinctly lacklustre (Griffiths 143). Opposing sides of the political spectrum criticised the BBC's *Germinal* 'for what they felt were its

political leanings' through the strikes (Griffiths 141). The BBC cannot be seen to be taking either the side of protestors or of the police, and so this careful nothingness, the institutional policy of a political net zero, means that a BBC adaptation of a socially revolutionary text like Zola's *Germinal* or Hugo's *LM* is antithetical from its inception. In comparison, Marcus Bluwal's 1972 television adaptation of *LM* 'clearly reflects the political tensions in the fallout from the revolutionary events' of the civil unrest of May 1968 in France, rather than 'abstracting the concept of social revolution into a metaphorical hall of mirrors and its potentially ahistorical vacuum' (Grossman and Stephens 2016, 12).

Instead of creating a show that creates links between Hugo's novel about inequality and the yellow vests of France, the international support for the Black Lives Matter movement, or any other contemporary fight for equality, Davies manages to make reference to none, creating a non-descript revolution within an ahistorical vacuum that is, at best, simply a threat to the individual lives of Marius and Valjean. While it may be argued that the revolution is intentionally written to be universal, relatable to any call of revolution, this whitewashes Hugo's novel: figuratively de-politicising *LM* by making the themes of income inequality *historic* ones (thus no longer issues we as an audience must care about) and literally by placing *white* bodies in positions of power, happiness and success. What the characters of *BBCMis* fight for is not communal freedom or justice, but for individual valour and the right of white, cisgender, heterosexual middle-class people to exist in peace.

'COLOUR-BLIND' CASTING

In almost every interview, review, or promotional piece written about *BBCMis*, the phrase 'colour-blind casting' is implemented as short-hand to refer to the cast being not-entirely-

white, especially noted because of its being a period drama. *The Guardian*'s Tara Conlan reports that the BBC 'has brought Hugo's novel "right into the 21st century", according to its director general, Tony Hall, with one of its most "inclusive casts" ever' (Conlan, *The Guardian*), citing 'colour-blind casting' as the BBC's method to create a more diverse cast and crew. While it is not clear who is quoted as first using the words 'colour-blind' in terms of *BBCMis*'s casting, it is a term that is returned to throughout the press for the show including in *Digital Spy* (Jeffery), *The Sydney Morning Herald* (McManus), *The Guardian* (Adams; Hogan) and *The Telegraph* (Rees). This claim of 'colour-blindness' is not only untrue, the proclamation itself refuses to acknowledge the racist and colourist disparity between those cast in lead roles and how that affects our reading of the show and its themes.

'Colour-blind' casting is a term that is intended to mean a production that has been cast without regard to an actor's skin colour, where the casting team are 'blind' to anything but the actor's ability. While Naomi Schor acknowledges that 'the fantasy of stripping language of its figurality' is 'doomed to fail' (83), Schor states that just as 'blindness is viewed in a certain figural tradition as a higher form of insight, [blindness is also] viewed as the paradoxical means to achieve a higher form of creativity' (102). The intended usage of 'colour-blind' here is an allegedly positive one where the blindness is implied to mean 'non-discriminatory', but this metaphorical blindness carries with it the implicit stereotype of the purity of the 'moral blind' (Schor 92). The journalists praising *BBCMis* for its colour-blindness argue that this blindness has allowed for a form of creativity purer than could be created by the *corrupt* sighted person (which ignores the ability of blind people to also be racist). What the BBC deploys is not a higher form of creativity, but a facet of racism. I will continue to use

'colour-blind' in quotes throughout this discussion as I argue that the BBC pride themselves on the ableist, racist practise and language.

Goddard argues that:

if it were true that we could be blind to colour, that race can bear no semiotic signification, then the very concept of colour-blind casting would be redundant – if we did not see colour then there would be no need to consciously ignore it (2017, 83).

In an ideal post-racial society, a talent-over-colour casting process would be germane, but we still exist in a world that is racist, and so claiming to ignore race 'in an appearance-based industry, where there is a history of discrimination, only furthers discrimination' (Hopkins 131). Equally important to the disparity between the casting of white actors and non-white actors (without even breaking non-white into more specific categories) is that 'having a color-blind policy alone does not hold producers accountable' (Hopkins 152). Producers can get away with the bare minimum needed to pass official inclusion quotas without putting due diligence into the quality of the roles provided, simultaneously appearing to be championing 'diversity' while not addressing the structural inequality that lies behind the *need* for qualitative checklists. The BBC, for instance, set a target in 2016 to have a 15% Black Asian and Ethnic Minority (BAME) workforce across all staff and leadership roles by 2020 (BBC Media Centre), and while they achieved that goal in their 'all staff' category, they only reached 11.9% for leadership roles ("Diversity & Inclusion Plan"). Their 2021-23 diversity and inclusion plan also remains broad, not breaking down categories such as 'BAME', 'Disability' or 'LGBTQ+' into more distinct groups; a tactic often used to disguise an over-saturation of one race or queer identity over others. The LGBTQ+ bracket could, for

example, be populated by an entirely cisgender, gay male workforce, and while this would fulfil the 8% target of LGBTQ+ people, it could hardly be regarded as representative of the entire queer community. By implementing a percentile target for staff, the institution does not adequately capture the needs of different groups with different needs. This preference from companies like the BBC for practises like 'colour-blind' casting is because of what Shelby Steele points out in *White Guilt;* where there is an

> unacknowledged white need for redemption - not true redemption, which would have concentrated policy on black development, but the appearance of redemption, which requires only that society, in the name of development, seem to be paying back its former victims with preferences (Steele 499).

By placing time and resources behind a practise that is *outwardly* progressive and thus 'paying back' minority communities for previous harm, majority-white companies can gain the appearance of doing better through making visible choices in casting actors of colour while avoiding any real systematic change in leadership roles.

In the last several years, dissent about the term 'colour-blind' has come to the foreground, with creators of colour arguing to replace the term with 'colour-conscious casting', which stakes its claim as an alternate that acknowledges that 'it is counterintuitive to argue that problems related to race can be fixed by ignoring race altogether' (Hopkins 142). Goddard agrees, arguing that when directors demonstrate an awareness of racial stereotypes, purposefully adjusting the text to avoid typecasting or racial bigotry (such as replacing the word 'fair' as a signifier of beauty in a Shakespearean context), race can be navigated in a way that provides an actor a satisfying role and an audience with an often uncomfortable but necessary challenge to their expectations (Goddard 2007, 84). Notably,

despite *BBCMis*' alleged 'colour-blind' casting, there are no actors of Southeast Asian, East Asian, or Middle Eastern heritage in any speaking role in *BBCMis*, with only one South Asian cast member. This betrays how casting for British television retains the idea that 'diversity' is mostly seen as a binary between being Black or white. An alternate, all-Black casting choice might instead have been a genuine criticism of the novel's implicit racism, dedicating space to accepting the racial discrimination within the story instead of furthering it through its metatextual choices. By claiming that casting, language and the twenty-first century itself is beyond the need to 'see' race, the show in fact becomes complicit in continuing racial stereotypes and upholding hierarchies of power where, as usual, Black and brown people are the criminal poor who must die for the beautiful, deserving white protagonists to flourish.

HISTORICAL CONSULTANT ROBERT TOMBS

Jasper Rees digs down into the show's casting and is self-referentially uncharacteristic as a *Telegraph* writer in his defence of the non-white cast:

> There will be grief in the usual quarters that colour-blind casting sacrifices period accuracy on the altar of what some dismiss as political correctness. […] But yet another exhausting trip down this rabbit hole is surely beneath us all. Those arguing for white-only casts in classic adaptations should logically also insist that Hugo's characters speak French, and all fashions be absolutely bang-on (Rees, *The Telegraph*).

Rees does, however, raise the point that *BBCMis*'s 'historical consultant, Professor Robert Tombs, probably wasn't asked for his thoughts on the casting of Adeel Akhtar as Thénardier

and David Oyelowo as Javert', revealing his assumption that nineteenth-century France was a wholly white society, and that a historian would shoot 'colour-blind casting' down for being historically inaccurate. What this statement begins to unpick is that a production is not simply a writer, a director, a casting director and some actors, but a project in which an understanding of racism is necessary in all roles, especially behind the camera, which casting alone cannot disguise. While I will not examine every member of every creative team on the project, I will use as an example the named historical consultant and how his inclusion in the creative team may have impacted a show that claims 'colour-blindness'.

Robert Tombs, Professor Emeritus of French History at the University of Cambridge and co-editor of Briefings for Brexit, wrote several columns in the *The Daily Telegraph* in the midst of the George Floyd protests, the content of which suggests that he would not be sympathetic to the imperatives of colour *conscious* casting. He criticises the 'woke' Left's 'clumsy attempt to start a nihilistic culture war and offend as many people as possible' by taking down statues of white supremacists, claiming these protestors are 'scapegoating heroes [as a] fun way to break lockdown and feel virtuous with no effort' (Tombs "Targeting Statues"). Tombs' use of dismissive and infantilising language suggests that he positions himself above the 'rabble ruining their own cause' (Tombs "Targeting Statues"). In his introduction to French history from 1814-1914, Tombs talks about how the 'combination of novelty, uncertainty, experiment and conflict in the political, ideological, international and socio-economic spheres makes nineteenth-century French history dramatic and frankly exciting' (Tombs 2006, 3). His refusal to extend this excitement to the same attempts at experimental political upheaval he is witnessing in 2020 suggest a potential hypocrisy

gained from historical distance to an event, where positionality as an expert in the past has granted him political sanctuary he benefits from in the present.

Tombs supports the teaching of the Empire in the British education system, but he also suggests that slave-owning white British people were not the *real* villains: his evocation of 'the successors of African rulers and traders who were among the biggest profiteers' and 'the horrific slave trade pursued by Arab traffickers' repositions white colonialism as secondary to the damage caused by non-white societies. Slave trades have of course existed outside of white, European colonisation, but the non-sequitur fallacy constructed here attempts to argue that whiteness had little or no role in the enslavement of Black Africans as a way to minimise the responsibility of slavery by British people. Tombs also places white abolitionists as morally superior young men who 'sweltered for decades off the coast of West Africa intercepting slave ships and releasing their captives'. As Akala notes, 'the British anti-slavery squadron […] received 'head money' for each African they 'liberated' – so no, it was not altruism - and they sometimes even sold the Africans they liberated back into slavery' (Akala 134). In his introduction to his history of France, Tombs argues that national society, culture and economy 'are all to a greater or lesser extent manufactured, and were mostly manufactured during the nineteenth century, as all over Europe States were making sustained and fairly successful efforts to control their subjects' lives and even to change their beliefs and culture' (Tombs 2006, 1). Tombs perhaps consciously attempts this same manufactured control by softening the legacy of the British Empire, which he describes as being 'short-lived', 'run on a shoestring', 'ramshackle', and functioning based on the 'willing cooperation from those it rather nominally ruled'. Tombs continues to argue that the colonised world and its diaspora should be thankful for the Empire: 'We celebrate our

"diversity". We are proud of our unique global connections. Both are legacies of the empire, which we need to remember, and parts of it even celebrate' (Tombs "A Mind Blank"). This too is a legacy of colonial thought: that colonised peoples should be *thankful* for their inclusion under the Empire's rule, including the ostensibly minimal-but-totally-necessary violence for the benefits it gives the previously-barbaric. By evoking the positive aspects of the British Empire in comparison to the perceived negatives of the colonised, Tombs sustains his own attempt to change British beliefs about our history.

Tombs' *Telegraph* opinions on the dangers of the George Floyd protests are ironically at odds with both Hugo's views and his own assertions about the excitement of nineteenth-century French protest. In purposefully oversimplifying Black Lives Matter protesters' goals, flattening a diverse group of peoples' actions into the idea of singular gang of ne'er-do-wells, Tombs turns away from his academic assertions that politics 'concern vast and diverse efforts to organize the public', and that 'there [is] not a single political narrative, but many, at different levels' (Tombs 2006, 2). It is thus instructive to consider how Tombs might have written about the June uprisings if he had been a right-wing journalist in 1830s France rather than an academic in the twenty-first century. Would he extend the same view of a politically complex and turbulent time, or simply say that the protesters are 'scapegoating heroes' as a 'fun way [...] to feel virtuous with no effort' (Tombs "Targeting Statues")?

As a historical consultant on a show where the casting was allegedly 'colour-blind' and thus occurred after the scripting and consultation had taken place, it is likely that, as Rees posits, Tombs was not asked for his academic opinion on whether a Black man 'should' be playing Javert or a South Asian man Thénardier in order for the production to be historically accurate. Whether or not he was asked about the role of race in France as part

of his consultation, Tombs, like any staff member, brings pre-conceived notions and biases into his work, and we cannot separate the role these biases play from the conception of a show. Tombs' *Telegraph* pieces are explicitly pro-white British, and they, like all opinions, are not neutral, and thus inform how the world of the *BBCMis* was built, even before roles were cast. To then cast actors of colour into this white-built world may look outwardly 'diverse', but in fact ensures that racist ideologies are unwittingly amplified by ill-conceived casting decisions.

THE RACISM OF BBCMIS'S CASTING

BBCMis opens with a sweeping panorama of the aftermath of the Battle of Waterloo. Horses die graphically beside their human counterparts: a mess of red blood, white skin and blue uniform. In amongst the dead is the mud, dirt saturated by blood and misery and, darting amongst it all, the only visibly brown man amongst the sea of piteous white faces: Thénardier. 'Our scavenger', as Davies calls him in the script, 'remains crouched and panting, like an animal' as he picks loot from the dead (Davies "Episode One" 1). As we have seen in Hugo's own descriptions of the man, Thénardier is ritualistically coded as a 'savage', his behaviour and activity compared to and associated with racial and metaphorical Blackness and with Indigenous tribes to imply Thénardier's inherent, uncompromisingly Evil personality.

Adeel Akhtar, a British actor of Pakistani-Kenyan heritage, is the only Asian man[14] in a speaking role in the show and plays one antagonist of two; the other being Javert played by

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[14] Akhtar refers to himself as an 'Asian man' and a 'brown man' in his interview with Ben Lawrence for the *Telegraph*.

David Oyelowo, a Black British actor.[15] Oyelowo and Akhtar are the only two dark-skinned actors of the lead cast, and both serve as barriers that the white protagonists Jean Valjean (Dominic West), Fantine (Lily Collins) and Cosette (Ellie Bamber) must overcome to achieve their freedom. By claiming that the show was cast 'blind', the BBC thus implies that their depictions of race are *unconsciously* racist which is, in most ways, worse. Through every casting decision made by the show, the BBC inadvertently admits that their casting directors do not comprehend the racism latent in only casting dark-skinned men as animalistic antagonists and light-skinned women as their innocent victims, thus revealing the main flaw of 'colour-blind' casting: that casting directors are not 'colour-blind', and that they continue to hold racially prejudiced beliefs that affect their casting abilities.

These casting decisions are insidiously masked behind platitudes in the press that Akhtar was cast in the role of Thénardier because of his talent as an actor rather than because Davies had written the character to be Asian, which begs the question why the talented Akhtar was cast in the role of Thénardier, the most vile character, rather than the protagonist Valjean. It is disingenuous to pretend that television is not a visual art form, and that part of the visuals being transferred to an audience is an acknowledgment that those of us who can see the screen can see the colour of the characters' skin. When only one brown person is given screen time, and in that time he is a spouse-abusing child-trafficker who steals valour and ends his story arc heading to South America to purchase slaves, this brown person then carries the weight of 'representing' every South Asian man. Celia R. Daileader argues that there lies the 'Catch-22 of colour-blind casting: even when the director is "blind"

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[15] I use 'antagonist' here not to simplify both as evil or as simple villains but in the sense that they are the principal characters that oppose Valjean, the protagonist. Javert is not a character without sympathy, but he does stand in the way of the hero's journey to freedom.

to "colour", the audience often will not be' (Daileader 2000, 183). Goddard furthers this by stating that while inclusive casting practises provide opportunities for performers of colour to play solid and challenging roles like Thénardier, the practice 'raises complex questions about when we are to see race or when we are to ignore it, about the extent to which directors are in fact colour-blind and about how underlying assumptions about race and gender might unwittingly inform casting decisions' (Goddard 2017, 83). How would the show look, for example, if against Adeel Akhtar's Thénardier, Valjean was played by Hajaz Akram, Fantine by Sair Khan, Cosette by Jameela Jamil, and Marius by Marwaan Rizwan? In this hypothetical cast of British Pakistani actors, race is no longer the visual tool used to divide protagonist and antagonist and we as audience no longer accept the short-hand of race as an explanation for Thénardier's moral failings. Thénardier is no longer the only brown person on screen and so in a very literal way *not all* brown people in the world are evil.

We also see in *BBCMis* an affectation of 'colour blind' productions as argued by both Verma and Goddard: that productions that attempt a 'colour-blind' multiculturalism often encourage their actors of colour to speak in drama-school trained Received Pronunciation (RP) accents, affording the actors a 'neutral' accent intended to draw attention away from their race. Verma distinguishes these productions from those by primarily Black and Asian companies, who encourage 'costuming and/or language styles that evoke the performer's Asian-African-Caribbean heritages' to proactively draw attention to the actor's race (Goddard 2017, 87; Verma 1996, 194). *BBCMis* replaces French working-class mannerisms with those of Cockney Londoners (the stereotype of 'poor' in British period dramas), which Griffiths calls 'something of a hallmark of BBC adaptations, part of BBC adaptive poetics'

(Griffiths 132). While on the surface this choice creates an alternate universe in which every

person of colour is a born Frenchman, able to speak French with their native RP/Cockney

mannerisms (and thus positing that colonial views of race do not exist), the production in

fact ignores the real-world history of immigration following colonisation, furthering the

inaccurate perspective that racial diversity in Europe is a purely twenty-first century, 'woke'

occurrence.

In creating a world wholly inhabited by Black and brown Native French people, none

of whom bear connection to cultures outside of their Frenchness, we witness an eradication

of colonial history for the ease of a colonial watcher. As the period drama glorifies a cult of

British and European idealism, symbolising a greatness of history, a preoccupation with

manners and fantastic opulence, audiences would not retain the same feelings of escapism

should we question *how* this opulence was funded. Giddings, Selby and Wensley argue that

the public's thirst for heritage as depicted in the adaptation of the nineteenth-century novel

is 'symptomatic of the condition of the national psyche which is shedding layers of

modernity and reverting to its own past tones under the stress of contemporary economic,

political and social crisis' (Giddings, Selby and Wensley 38). Should any of these characters

of colour have reminders of a life beyond France (or the UK), we would have to contend

with the *institutional* layer to their misery, rather than the purely personal. The Thénardier

family is not poor because the French have colonised their homelands, they are not

discriminated against because they are of African, Caribbean or South Asian heritage, it is

because of Thénardier's personal choices. By removing cultural factors of discrimination, the

production blames not the white society but the brown body for his *own* misfortune.

THÉNARDIER: THE EVIL BROWN MAN

BBCMis's Thénardier is very much the same man presented in Hugo's novel: a 'sly, greedy, lazy, and cunning' man, part of a 'breed' who 'blame anyone in the vicinity for anything that befalls them' (II,3,ii,317). Davies does, however, insert new elements of characterisation for the character: he physically abuses his wife and both of his daughters and he openly traffics children to paedophiles.[16] Post-9/11, South Asian, Middle Eastern and North African actors saw a surge in roles on the BBC and in Hollywood with the proliferation of the Terrorist role: sly, greedy and cunning people who are a breed of violent men bent on blaming anyone in the vicinity for anything that befalls them (Shaheen 172). While Thénardier is not the type who commits acts of terrorism by bombing buildings, he is an equivalent character in the canon of villainy: the ringleader of a gang of organised criminals plotting to undermine (white) society by capitalising on the pageantry of fear. For all Akhtar gives nuance to the role, it is undeniable that his character is the ultimate moral antagonist of the show. The last we see of Thénardier in both the novel and the BBC drama is his claim to be moving abroad to purchase slaves: 'With the money from Marius, Thénardier made himself a slave trader' (V,9,iv,1185). "I want to set up a business in La Hoya. The New World! There's money to be made there, slaves to trade" (Davies "Episode Six" 51). There is some argument here that Thénardier's desire to become part of the socially affluent class (like Marius and his grandfather) suggests that this white racial group evokes questionable morality. While holding this, we also conclude that just as the production's historical consultant Robert

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[16] I use the phrase 'child trafficking' as that is how Sara Kruzan chooses to refer to the abuse she faced as a child in her interview with *Ear Hustle*: 'a pimp, to me, is something that our society has glorified and actually made it comfortable to accept sexually assaulting and raping people. […] a trafficker makes an individual be held accountable for being a violent predator, an intentional, violent predator.' ([00:11:07:01]).

Tombs claimed that the true beneficiaries of the enslavement of Black people were African and Arab traffickers not white British men or the Empire, so too does *BBCMis* position the young, white Marius as the moral superior to the brown Thénardier, inadvertently or not claiming that the true perpetrators of enslavement were, in fact, poor and brown immigrants and not rich and white European colonisers. Like his novel counterpart, Thénardier ultimately becomes 'more awful than the evil rich: the evil poor' (IV,2,i,706).

Then, when talking to Valjean at his inn in Montfermeil, Thénardier is ready to traffic the child Cosette to a man he assumes is a paedophile, offering to bring her to Valjean's rented room: 'Would you like the little girl in with you, monsieur? For a small consideration? No need for the wife to know' (Davies "Episode Three" 20). In episode four, Éponine tells Marius that she is the type of person who will 'go out in the evenings, and sometimes I don't come home at night' (Davies "Episode Four" 39). She is given no canonical age in the show but in interviews Davies says that he writes the similarly aged Cosette to be '16 or 17' (Lacob, *PBS*). How long the child Éponine has been trafficked by her father is not made clear to us, but she has evidently been sexually abused to earn money for her father for a substantial period. This trafficking of underage girls is referred to in the novel with regards to both Éponine and Cosette (III,8,iv,609; II,3,ix,348), and while Thénardier is by no means repelled by the thought in the novel (Lewis 2015, 11), *BBCMis* goes a step further by making Thénardier not just complicit but going out of his way to encourage it. The ease and comfort with which Thénardier makes the offer to bring Cosette to the room, followed by his genuine surprise at Valjean's refusal, implies that he has made the offer to guests who have not refused him before. He then normalises the trafficking by telling Valjean that 'it takes all sorts to make a world' (Davies "Episode Three" 22). The sexual abuse of minors is perhaps

one of the least contested taboos in our society, and the businessman who both permits it and disguises its evidence, thus allowing it to happen in perpetuity without consequence, is an easy pick for the character we would deem the most morally reprehensible in the show.

We must then consider why Thénardier tells Valjean that he is willing to do Valjean this favour without his wife's knowledge. The Thénardiers of the novel are equals, both as responsible for the mistreatment of their children and their ward as the other: as discussed in chapter one, both 'were in the highest degree capable of the kind of odious progress that aims for evil' (I,4,ii,130). While they are highly gendered, with Madame Thénardier's abuse stemming from her lack of mothering nurture, they willingly traffic Cosette together within Hugo's novel. As Madame Thénardier gleefully tells Valjean after she has been paid: 'Take her, keep her, take her away, cart her off, sprinkle her with sugar, stuff her with truffles, drink her, eat her, and may the Holy Blessed Virgin and all the saints in heaven bless you!' (II,3,ix,348). *BBCMis*'s Madame Thénardier, played by Olivia Coleman, is visibly similar to every other portrayal from the stage musical to the 2012 film: a middle-aged white actress with bright red curls who has a larger frame in comparison to the petite Fantine and Cosette, where 'fat' is intended to be read as a criticism and not as a body type. *BBCMis* does not shy away from depicting Madame Thénardier as a child abuser, chasing after Cosette with a whip to the laughter of her guests and keeping her infant child Gavroche in a cellar before attempting to abandon him as they move to Paris. However, soon after Madame Thénardier pronounces that she has 'never been able to take to […] that nasty little creature' in reference to her son, Thénardier hits her hard enough to send her reeling (Davies "Episode Five" 4). In the process of this spousal abuse, the audience's attention is diverted from the mistreatment of Gavroche to the mistreatment of Madame Thénardier,

converting any sympathy we have for the Black child into sympathy for the white woman.

By creating this dynamic of a physically abusive (brown) husband to a victimised (white)

wife, Madame Thénardier's accountability is lessened; her abuse is not her own but a

product of her husband's infectious evil. As with Hugo's novel, in which we get a brief notice

that Madame Thénardier is dead (V,9,iv,1185), the last we see of *BBCMis's* Madame

Thénardier is at the beginning of episode five, incarcerated at a women's prison and heard

of no more (Davies "Episode Five" 15-6). Through her final moments on the show, Madame

Thénardier has been reduced to a shell of her previous being: cowed and cowering by the

fireplace, not-quite-stopping her husband's continued abuse but now clearly longing to

(Figure 13). She has not been redeemed to us through any action or any ask of forgiveness,

but in her final moments we see that she, unlike her husband, is facing the consequences of

her actions and feels regret for the decisions that have led to her being trapped in her

current circumstances.

Figure 123 A shot from BBCMIS. In a dark prison cell, Madame Thérnadier, a white woman with red hair, clutches at her two daughters, Azelma (with dark brown kinky hair) and Éponine (with curly ginger hair). Credit text at the bottom reads "Directed by Tom Shankland".

Hugo does not give Madame Thénardier this regret, does not humanise her at her

bitter end. As discussed in Chapter One, Hugo makes his Thénardiers equally bestial,

racializing *both* as non-white. Within the BBC drama, the white Madame Thénardier is a

victim of her brown husband, her abuse rationalised as a symptom of his. Her own racism

(as will be discussed further below) is not a trait of her evilness but is used as a visual

metaphor for her ill-made decision to marry the man that she did, thus reinforcing 'theories

about the degenerating effects of racial mixing that were to be found in eighteenth-century

colonial ethnographies' (Prasad 19). In purporting to being 'colour-blind casting', *BBCMis*

instead sits within the well-trod tradition of white womanhood's suffering at the hand of

savage Black and brown masculinity (Hilb 145; Shaheen 180). While Monsieur Thénardier is

unquestionably an evil character who, in the filmic narrative, *deserves* to suffer for being the

villain, *BBCMis* redeems Madame Thénardier, employing her white womanhood against her

husband's brownness to elicit sympathy and thus save her from a decisive classification as

his evil equal.

MONTPARNASSE

Montparnasse, the most active member of Thénardier's gang as played by Jumayn Hunter,

becomes a Black man in *BBCMis*. Hugo's Montparnasse is a renowned dandy: '[finding]

himself pretty, he had wanted to be elegant, and, well, the first form elegance takes is

idleness; and the idleness of a pauper means crime' (III,7,iii,596). He is a young man (in the

script he is nineteen (Davies "Episode Five" 10)); young enough that the novel's Valjean

believes there is enough time to redeem him and to spare him from being swallowed up by

the life course that begins and ends with prison: 'My boy, you are embarking on one of the

most laborious of existences, out of sheer laziness!' (IV,4,ii,756). In a deleted scene, Davies

translates this into: 'You'll go in there at twenty and come out an old man. Believe me. I've

been there' (Davies "Episode Five" 11). This humanising scene is cut from the aired drama,

and the Montparnasse of *BBCMis* is portrayed as a simple, animalistic criminal.

Wearing his blood-red waistcoat, Montparnasse cuts a bright figure against the dusky colours of his white gang mates' clothes. This waistcoat is more of a circus ring leader's than it is a poor dandy's aspirational suit of armour. He wears no shirt under his waistcoat so that his lean, muscled arms are pronounced, the waistcoat is cropped to reveal his tattooed back and stomach, and he wears no cravat, hat or jacket as his peers do: inappropriately dressed, even amongst the poor and the criminal, nothing like his preening and polished Hugo-self. Beside his white gangmates' upright postures he hunches, his centre of gravity lower (Figure 14), and when he commits crimes we are treated to close-ups of his grinning face lingering on his raw glee at tying up Valjean for a night of torture (Figure 15), a close-up not afforded to his fellow gang-mates.

Figure 13 A shot from BBCMIS – on the left the original lighting and on the right with the exposure increased. In a dark room stand three men. Two are white men with dark paint over their eyes, dressed in greyish suits, one wearing a top hat. Between them is Montparnasse, who is a Black man. He is hunched over, wearing a red waistcoat and baring sleeve-less arms.

Figure 14 A shot from BBCMIS. Montparnasse grins down at Jean Valjean, a partially obscured white man.

From the script it seems that Davies had written Montparnasse to be the dandy Hugo had imagined him as: 'sauntering after [Valjean], MONTPARNASSE. With a rose between his teeth, Hugo says' (Davies "Episode Five" 11), which implies the casting and costume department, led by Shankland, made the decision to cast Hunter in the role, and to reduce his dandy identity. Whichever decision came first (to cast a Black man and then dress him down or the reverse), the racism that implies a Black man cannot be the Montparnasse who is 'cute, effeminate, graceful,' but only 'wiry, lethargic, cruel' (III,7,iii,596) is anti-Black. It presupposes that Montparnasse's sensuality, which is rooted in his effeminacy, is incompatible with Blackness, both reducing the character to the recurrent stereotype that Black men are animalistic in their violence, and that Black sexuality is bestial, his bare skin and muscled physique posed as a threat to the white victim. This choice is all the more insidious when considering that Hugo's Valjean makes the explicit link between Montparnasse and being treated negatively as a Black person, as discussed above regarding the use of Hugo's word 'nègre'. The show without irony ensures that Valjean's speculation becomes a prophesy, and that Montparnasse is made into a Black man through his continued criminality.

While we often perceive the racism of the past as being greater than that of the present, as in the 'of its time' fallacy described in the introduction, the BBC's choice to hypermasculinise Montparnasse was made because of the legacy of past racism adopted by this twenty-first century white creative team. Jumayn Hunter might have been allowed to play a Montparnasse who drew on mixed-race late-eighteenth century aristocrats Thomas-Alexandre Dumas ('a fashionable young count' (Reiss 58)) or Chevalier de Saint-Georges ('Proudly elegant', and who dressed 'in the finest clothing' (Reiss 59)) for inspiration, but

remained inevitably characterised as a violent, dehumanised Black man because of industry-wide structural racism in the present.

PATRON-MINETTE

When we see Thénardier and his gangmates trap their prey in episode four of *BBCMis*, they enter with 'soot-blackened face's, a strip of black paint over their eyes (Davies "Episode Four" 55). This strip is more akin to war paint than what Hugo explicitly names as blackface (III,8,xx,662). These white gang members are kept out of the foreground, their face paint barely readable in the dim lighting (Figure 14). While the make-up put on these background actors may have gone unnoticed by most of the audience, this scene gives us the ringleader, Thénardier (an evil brown man), Montparnasse (a feral Black man) and a group of nameless white men in almost-blackface, unironically re-creating the racism of Hugo's original passage to instil fear of an unknown *blackness* within the audience. The audience is shown a group of faceless white criminals whose skin has been darkened because of their association with two dark-skinned, violent men enacting brutality on the struggling white Valjean, who is protecting the safety of his white daughter. As Mikki Kendall points out, this is nothing new: 'Media narratives still render men of colour as the likely assailants in any crime' (Kendall in Ware xiv). While it may be argued that this representation of the Patron Minette is faithful to the use of blackface in the novel and is thus simply part of Davies' attempt to make a faithful adaptation, this choice is further evidence that the production refuses to consider race in any meaningful way. With the claim that the show was cast 'colour-blind', we must assume that these roles were created without a specific race in mind. However the script's assertion that it is a 'strip of black paint' and not full blackface betrays the production's muddled attempt at 'colour blindness'. If race does not exist in the *BBCMis* universe, there

would be no reason not to cover these white extras' faces in a full covering of black paint or soot: this would not be blackface because, theoretically, minstrel shows cannot exist when skin colour is not a factor to be mocked (or even perceived). The producers and the creative team made the executive decision to make deliberate strokes across the actors' eyes because it is not acceptable in our racial landscape to put an actor in full blackface in 2019, and so we know that race *does* operate in this production, and that the casting directors are not 'blind' to these actors' whiteness.

There is little reason why they *had* to paint these actors' faces; very few audience members would either *know*, notice or care about this lapse of fidelity to Hugo's racism. The creative team had an awareness of what the original text said, and they still chose to follow it. If we believe that every creative decision is purposeful, this means the creative team leant into the racial ambiguity, using the paint to create 'colliers, negroes, or fiends, whatever you feared most' without interrogating how this creative choice is an act of racism. The creative team still opted to paint these men's faces despite this complex territory. By choosing this middle path, Davies and the creative team have shown themselves as both *aware* of what not to do (overt blackface) and yet unaware of or uncaring of the racist overtone of the meaning behind the gesture (dark skin is inherently evil). Because of this refusal to acknowledge race outside of a desire not to be labelled 'racist', there is no internal critique of the stereotyping, nor an attempt to redress the balance, and so instead of being a potential conduit for a condemnation of Hugo's racism, the BBC drama is a continuation of it. By pushing this tension between modern sensibilities and authorial intent into the background, the production refuses to address how racial parity cannot come simply by putting *more* Black and brown faces on screen; but by managing the roles and stereotypes that these faces are associated with.

THE COLOURISM OF THE THÉNARDIER CHILDREN

Within the umbrella of racism is the concept of colourism 'defined as an intraracial system of inequality based on skin color, hair texture, and facial features that bestows privilege and value on physical attributes that are closer to white' (Wilder and Caine 2011, 578). Lighter-skinned people often access greater privilege than those with dark skin due to a closer perceived relationship with whiteness. As Hunter states:

'[T]he maintenance of white supremacy (aesthetic, ideological, and material) is predicated on the notion that dark skin represents savagery, irrationality, ugliness, and inferiority. White skin, and, thus, whiteness itself, is defined by the opposite: civility, rationality, beauty, and superiority. These contrasting definitions are the foundation for colorism' (238).

Colourism is embodied in explicitly exclusionary assessments like the pencil and paper bag tests used to distinguish between the categories of white, coloured and Black people in apartheid South Africa and the Jim Crow era United States, and the degree of harshness of treatment through educational and judicial systems (Moffitt 2020, 68). In the media, this colourism is often displayed in the prevalence of light-skinned mixed-race women in roles intended for dark-skinned Black women (Freeman, *The Guardian*). The Thénardier children are an example of colourism in practise, where there is a spectrum in this family between the unwanted Gavroche who is the most coded as Black, the oft side-lined Azelma in the middle both in age and in colour, and the desired Éponine who is the most closely aligned with whiteness.

There is an unsaid question in the casting of three mixed-race Black and white

heritage children to a mother and father who are white and South Asian. While this would

be an accepted practise in a 'colour blind' casting, (where the race of the family does not

have to sit in a Punnett square or make genealogical sense), this then goes against why

these three children are of the same ethnic 'bracket', especially one child who seems to

have inherited her mother's iconic red hair. In giving Éponine a mother with red hair, we as

an audience are assumedly meant to create a bond between the two, and yet they have no

Black father to make familial bonds with. The Thénardier children are thus divorced from

their Blackness. As Wilder and Caine find in their study of Black families, children raised by

parents who include race socialisation in their parenting including 'knowledge and

recognition of the legacy of slavery, a positive self-awareness and ethnic pride, and

preparation for dealing with issues related to racism and inequality' show greater ability to

protect themselves from the mental and physical effects of a colourist world, and are more

prepared to create positive spheres of existence (Wilder and Caine 2011, 569). *BBCMis*

removes the ability for the Thénardier children to be racially socialised to be Black-positive

by their family, leaving them (and the audience) vulnerable to normalised structural

discrimination.

ÉPONINE AND COSETTE

Éponine, the eldest Thénardier daughter is, as portrayed by Erin Kellyman, a mixed-race

person with light skin and red, curly hair. In the world of the BBC drama, Éponine plays a

role that faces many mixed-race women with Black and white ancestry: the split subject

who is separated by her Blackness and eroticised on account of her lightness (Goddard

2007, 163). Éponine is visibly "exotic" enough to draw Marius's attention from the crowd of whiteness he has been indoctrinated in as a part of rebellious curiosity, but light-skinned enough to be an acceptable object of lust in Marius' wet-dream. Within the *BBCMis* world a foundational moment of understanding Marius has about Éponine is meeting her at La Chaumière. As Davies describes it:

> This place is where you go for a bit of rough, it's a haunt of LOW-LIVES, WHORES off duty and their PIMPS. Sort of half outside, under trees with lights in them, and half inside, more barn like, darker, more sinister (Davies "Episode Four" 31-2).

Marius's trip to the club is used to highlight how 'foreign' French culture has become outside of his enclosed white upbringing's purview. Immigrant cultures and workers are sexualised and eroticised to cater to colonial Parisian boys looking for 'a bit of rough', and for somewhere/one darker than their typical white haunts. As Black actress Carmen Munroe accounted of her early career: 'I might have been asked to play a role where the character was just described as "exotic". She wouldn't have a character name or a title, and she wouldn't have much to do – she would just be exotic. You know, "enter exotic nurse"' (qtd. in Goddard 2007, 19). The same fetishization of the visuals of the 'exotic woman' that haunted Munroe in the 1950s haunts this scene: La Chaumière is laden with orientalism: *exotic* women (Figure 16) dance to *exotic* music in a room filled with smoke, lit by the light of *exotic* red paper lanterns (Figure 17) and *exotic* hanging lanterns with red glass (Figure 18). I emphasise the word *exotic* with irony, but *BBCMis* does not.

Figures 15, 17 and 18 Shots from BBCMIS. In the first, in a dark room Marius, a white man, is being pushed back by a sex worker of ambiguous ethnicity with dark hair and an aquiline nose. He looks trapped. In the second, Marius is in a dark hall, face confused or lost. Strung from the ceiling are red lanterns. In the third, people laugh in the same dark room. In focus is an ornamental metal lantern fitted with red glass evocative of a Turkish mosaic lamp.

Orientalism was a particular fetish of nineteenth-century French authors including

Hugo (Yee 2016 20; Haddad 55), and La Chaumière is a very Hugolian form of exoticism: as

Robb notes, Hugo's *Les Orientales* 'seemed to be set in a Never-Never Land which

resembled Spain, Algeria, Turkey, Greece, and China, and called itself 'The East'' (1998, 138).

The 2018 production does not however treat this as a dated and racist trope; instead

capitalising on it itself to distance the white Marius (and audience) from the strange and the

abnormal Other. As Haddad argues of nineteenth-century poets, *BBCMis* uses 'the

mediation of the Orient as a setting, pleasure and edification' (Haddad 53), and in the jolting

camera movements and smoky atmosphere of *BBCMis*, we are brought along with Marius,

leering at half-seen oddities from his perspective. If the production had wanted us to turn a

critical eye on the trope, we might instead have been taken on a tour through the

perspective of a worker, humanising those made to participate in this 'exotic' show as

perceived by the white male gaze. Davies' description of the club as being 'barn like' evokes

the idea that these people are more animal than human, or perhaps some kind of mixed

breed: 'mongrels' in comparison to the respectable (white) society who can exist in the

daylight. Éponine's red hair is also a legacy of Hugo-esque racism against 'mongrels'. In *Bug-

Jargal*, it is the monstrous, deformed mixed-race Habibrah who has iconic red hair, a symbol

of his grotesque, hybrid construction (Prasad 136), and Robb quotes a note from *Les

Orientales* in which an 'erudite' Hugo reminds us that 'One must not forget […] that red hair

is considered beautiful by certain Oriental peoples' (qtd. in Robb 1998, 140).

The scene at La Chaumière is used to set up the next, in which Marius has a wet

dream about 'the wrong girl' (Davies, qtd. in Lacob, *PBS*). He feels disgusted at himself for

doing so, and while this is ostensibly explained because he *loves* Cosette, and so it feels like

he has cheated on her, we are given the visuals of a white man hating himself for having erotic thoughts for the *other*, a Black woman. The blame for this dream is placed on Éponine: she is seen as interfering with Marius, breaking into his room and interrupting his thoughts. It is because of her depravity that Marius is seen to be tainted. Against Ellie Bamber's Cosette, Kellyman's Éponine is the scantily dressed, sexually confident young woman who teases Marius with her audacity. Davies describes it as a moment of contrast between Cosette and Éponine:

> I couldn't resist giving [Marius] an erotic dream about the wrong girl. He wants to have a dream about Cosette, which is all kind of pure and kissy-kissy. Instead he finds she's – she's changed into Éponine, who has a more kind of direct and visceral appeal (Lacob, *PBS*).

Éponine is the 'off-duty […] whore' who is tantalising to the good-boy Marius because of her association with the foreign via her Blackness. She is exciting because she is the kind of woman he would never *dream* of marrying – especially in comparison to the white, blonde, respectable and 'pure' Cosette. It is in the comparison that the characters' racial identities become important; a fact that has remained consistent through the casting of *LM.* Until February 2018 there had been 17 Black actresses playing Éponine in the *LM* stage musical and only 2 playing Cosette (not including regional productions). If the BBC production were truly 'colour blind', it would be statistically unlikely to once again mirror a racial dynamic in which the white, blonde actress portrays the pure, angelic Cosette against a Black actress playing the 'visceral', downtrodden Éponine. But as Goddard argues:

> biological suppositions about black women's genitalia underscore ideas of an uncontrollable, depraved, sexuality, which is placed in opposition to ideas of white

women's chastity (Goddard 2007, 5).

We are never privy to a peep show from Cosette, it is only Éponine's Black body that is sexualised and displayed to us. Even assuming that Davies did not write this part specifically for a Black actress and thus this 'visceral appeal' of Éponine was not her intrinsic Blackness, we cannot ignore that a vast creative team read this script and cast these actors for these parts.

Despite previously keeping himself for Cosette, Marius cannot help but be infected by Éponine's uncontrollable sexuality. Her aggression has tampered with Marius (and by extension Cosette's) sanctity, and for that she must die: killed for the white, heteronormative couple's greater good. We are told in the show's conclusion that we can sympathise with Éponine because despite keeping Marius and Cosette apart, she rethinks her ways and dies instead of further causing their *pure* relationship trouble. Éponine is knowingly used by Marius as his servant and go-between and eventually sacrifices herself as his shield, nobly using her Black body to preserve Cosette's white womb and its legitimate white line. This dynamic plays into the trope of a white woman's ruin coming from the sheer concept of a mixed-race marriage, one of the foundational pillars of white supremacy. White supremacist and colonial capital come from the protection of a white womb so that it only provides legitimate white babies to further the white society, with miscegenation being the greatest threat to this purity (Ware 38; Prasad 135; Gaitet 255). The child that Madame Thénardier abuses most, Cosette, is the idol of white supremacy: a virtuous, blonde child with pure white skin (Dyer 127). She is the child Madame Thénardier cannot have in her marriage with her brown husband (even in a 'colour blind' world). Cosette is emblematic of who is purportedly abused most terribly in a world where a brown man is head of house:

the disenfranchised white. Had both Cosette and Éponine (as well as Marius) been portrayed by mixed-race actors, or a mixed-race Cosette played against a white Éponine, the conversation about race would be a different one, but as it stands, the knowing casting of people of colour as the wretched, sexualised poor and never as the happily-ever-after elite is a continuation of white supremacist prejudice.

Figure 19 A shot from BBCMIS. In a cart sit Madame Thénardier, a white woman with curly ginger hair pinned under a hat, and Gavroche, a young Black child. Gavroche has brown skin and a large, curly brown afro. Madame Thénardier wears a clean pink dress with a white overcoat, while Gavroche wears brown, dirty shirt and trousers.

Figure 20 A shot from BBCMIS. Sat in a cart are Madame Thénardier and her two daughters. We can see Madame Thénardier and Éponine's ginger hair underneath their bonnets, but we cannot see Azelma's hair. The girls wear light clothing and clutch two dolls: one of which is visibly white-skinned with straight brown hair.

GAVROCHE

While Hugo never gives a reason for Madame Thénardier's hatred of Gavroche in the novel, it is implied that she hates him and the two other sons she abandons because they are male: 'her hatred of the human race began with her sons' (IV,6,i,774). What we see in *BBCMis* is not a woman who hates her sons being male but a white woman incapable of loving her Black child. When the Thénardiers must pack up their belongings to escape ruin, Madame Thénardier tries to hurry her husband on until a soldier points out that Gavroche (Rayan Toppin) has been 'accidentally' left out back. As the cart pulls away, Madame Thénardier woefully looks back at her abandoned inn, disdain palpable for the Black, afro-haired child that cries beside her (Figure 19). It is uncomfortable to watch any person interact with a child they clearly despise, but even more so when confronted with the historical precedent and contemporary continuance of white mothers with mixed-race Black children despairing at a child they deem a 'mix gone wrong'. As Bell found in her investigation of white mothers of mixed-race Black children:

> Lightness of skin color and whiteness of hair is equated with being good, and dark skin color and black hair as negative, undesirable, unmanageable and the focus of needed intervention. […] Characteristics White women associated with Blackness they feared in their desire for the perfect mix included descriptions and photos of "afro-ie hair," skin that was too Black, and "poop brown" eyes (50).

Also in the cart sit the two Thénardier daughters: Éponine's red, loosely wavy hair sits bright against her dress, while Azelma's curly black hair is hidden, tucked into a bonnet (Figure 20). The two girls can be effectively whitened by their mother's influence, thus 'saving' them from their Blackness, but Gavroche is the darker skinned, afro-haired outlier to their party

who 'lost' her the mixed-race lottery. This is compounded by the production's hair and make-up designers. Reece Yates, the oldest Gavroche actor's natural hair appears to be texturally closer to Kellyman's, but he has likely been given a wig to purposefully mimic a more coiled-textured afro. Covered in dirt to convey his poverty, his skin is artificially darker in the show than in his brightly-lit headshots (Figure 21). This choice, designed to make Gavroche less associated with what is deemed 'civility' (a proximity to whiteness) than his two sisters, is a racist one that implies a closer relation to Blackness is a reason for his unmanageable 'wildness' (Bell 49). One Black fan, Sugar, chose to stop watching the show because of this treatment of Gavroche:

> the [episode] that sent me was cos… (*sighs*) [Madame Thénardier] looked at Gavroche, that lil' child, who was so cute, that was such a cute boy, and she called him a "beast" and… I was like ah, that's it. That's it for me. I can't watch it any more. [00:26:31]

Sugar was unable to treat race as a non-entity because the dynamic between these two characters echoed real anti-Black thought and language. By making the racism an unspoken factor, an audience member is made to fill the gaps themselves, and Sugar was left to contend with the insidious fact that Blackness is presented as being a feature that a white mother would find a bestial and unlovable quality in their child. While we as an audience might find this an unjust and unsympathetic feature of Madame Thénardier (especially given Gavroche's later loveable nature), the production still creates a reality in which these racial features are the source of this mother's distaste.

Figure 21 A comparison between Reece Yates' headshot and his character in BBCMis. Yates is a light skinned mixed-race child with short, lightly curly hair in his headshot. In the drama he wears a brown afro wig with blond highlights and dirt on his skin makes his skin tone a darker brown.

While in the novel Gavroche is simply referred to as an ignored, crying baby (II,3,i,315), in *BBCMis* he is often cut to beside the suffering Cosette as they cower together from Madame Thénardier at the inn in Montfermeil. This new-found visibility to the audience means he also becomes visible to Valjean, who in watching Cosette notices the abused Thénardier child too. In a scene that was not filmed, Valjean not only takes pity on Cosette but places a coin in Gavroche's shoe alongside hers. As it stands in the aired show, Valjean watches both children: a little white girl and a little Black boy, equally beaten and starved, and he chooses to leave with only Cosette. Gavroche can operate as a visual tool for audience pity, but his being left behind creates the question of why we are invited to witness his pain but not his rescue. In creating additional scenes for Gavroche we understand (perhaps for the first time for many *LM* musical fans,) that Gavroche is a Thénardier and in witnessing the violence enacted on his body, we understand later in the series why he is on the streets, alone. As Valjean does not know there is a second child to save in the novel, the plot can continue without the dilemma of taking him but in the show, his leaving Gavroche is an active decision. As a character set up as the pinnacle of goodness,

Valjean's leaving Gavroche must be interpreted as 'correct'. With the interpretation of Gavroche's Blackness being his mother's reason for hating him, these additional scenes of brutality characterise Valjean as willing to remain complicit in anti-Black child abuse. In a hypothetical casting in which both Gavroche and Cosette (as well as Azelma and Éponine) are all portrayed by mixed-race children, we would have the same racial dynamic as in the novel, but as it stands in *BBCMis*, the message transferred is that the white girl (from a higher class background) deserves saving more than the lower class Black boy because of their interlinked racial, gender and class backgrounds.

Figure 22 A shot from BBCMIS. Gavroche, a Black boy with a brown/blond afro, laughs. Behind him is a barricade made from wood, with dead soldiers lying in the street.

Figure 163 A photograph of Edward Crawford. He is a Black man wearing a vest with the USA flag printed on it. He holds a bag of crisps in one hand while winding up to throw a flaming tear gas cannister with the other. Two other protesters cheer behind him.

Unlike Issa of *LyMis*, *BBCMis*'s Gavroche laughs gleefully as he dances in the street, bullets ricocheting around him (Figure 22). He sees it as 'good sport' (Davies "Episode Six" 10) and there is some contemporary truthfulness to this: not that he is unaware of his situation, but that he is and has always been enlightened about his precarious position in society, and that this barricade, with soldiers aiming at him, is no higher stake than his usual life-or-death day-to-day existence as a Black boy. He has the ability to laugh because it is the only activity he is free to do, and he chooses to live brightly. As Brombert notes, the 'laughter of Gavroche is the laughter of the city, and the laughter of the city [...] is the laughter of revolution. This laughter is ominous. […] Gavroche himself may think that he is carefree. He is not' (Brombert 113). In his not-carefree dancing, he is a visual reminder of the apparent casualness of protesters like Edward Crawford, the Ferguson protester photographed eating from a bag of crisps as he throws a tear-gas canister 'out of the way of children' (Mindock, *The Independant*) in jeans and a tank top, his fellow protestors cheering behind him (Figure 23) (Griffin, *Buzzfeed News*). Gavroche and Crawford are not treating protest like fun because it is an activity truly done as sport, but because protest has become a normalised necessity. There is a distinct lack of shock to Gavroche's death in *BBCMis,* as compared to the musical and the Hollywood adaptation. BBC Gavroche's death culminates in a familiar vision of contemporary police brutality where, when Gavroche is shot, the show cuts to the face of the soldier who has killed him, and we see the face of a completely unremorseful, even smug, white man (Figure 24). This same soldier does not display the same degree of smugness at killing any other person at the barricade and it is not made clear why he has such a reaction to killing a child. This expression is more similar to the expressions Chris from *LyMis* makes when purposefully physically and sexually assaulting the Black children of Montfermeil (Figure 25) than to the horrified remorse of the soldier of

the 2012 film (Figure 26), so is perhaps an intentional mirroring of contemporary police brutality. This reading, however, relies on race and racism being existing institutions in the world of the show. Instead of being a sustained commentary on the racism of the police as *LyMis* was, *BBCMis*'s attempt is thus neither a condemnation nor a commentary on police brutality but a neutralised parroting of it.

Figure 2417 A shot from BBCMIS. A white male soldier in dress uniform looks off-screen. He is partially obscured, as if we are looking through the crack of a wall or hiding place. His expression is almost-neutral, though with some pleasure.

Figure 2518 A close-up shot of Chris from LyMis. He is a white man with a cigarette in his mouth. He has an amused expression. A Black boy stands behind him, looking cautious.

Figure 19 A close-up shot from the 2012 Hollywood adaptation. A white male soldier in dress uniform crouches. His eyes are hidden in shadow. He looks bereft.

AZELMA

Azelma, Madame Thénardier's second daughter, is visually more similar to Gavroche, with Type 3 curly black hair and brown skin as played by Alex Jarrett, Armani Johnson and Isabelle Lewis. Goddard states how hair is a 'central symbol' when considering performances in which Black women's power and beauty is contested in the Western white male gaze 'because black people's natural, kinky hair has historically been vilified as ugly' (2007, 162). Without the flamboyance of having red hair, Azelma is not the 'exotic' oddity that her sister is presented as. As such, she has less use for her looks and is used for her blood instead, her father ordering her to punch her hand through a window to make it bleed and then sitting with her to force the blood out to exploit pity from Valjean. In a scene that was cut from the show but written into the shooting script, Madame Thénardier tells her second-eldest child Azelma: '[Gavroche]? He was never any good. But Eponine [sic], my Eponine, she was always a lovely girl, she was always my favourite'. In return, Azelma gives her a 'thanks ma' look before watching her mother die (Davies "Episode Six" 42). Azelma's Blackness translates as being less deserving of profitable lust than her red-headed, paler sister in the eyes of her father, and renders her invisible in the eyes of her mother. She exists closer to Black than white in comparison to her sister, but closer to white than her brother, which allows her some familial liberties. Even by swapping the casting of Jarrett and Kellyman in the Éponine and Azelma roles, the production would have undercut this visual association with whiteness as beauty and Blackness as unimportance.

Figure 207 A screenshot of an Instagram post. Three children pose behind a pillar in their BBCMis costumes. Tiarna Williams has light skin and loose ginger curls, Isabelle Lewis has light brown skin and tight black curls and Rayan Toppin has brown skin and a brown afro.

Bell compares the posts white mothers make about their mixed-race Black children on mothering websites to the 'slave auction block' where white women 'evaluate and engage a public discussion' on the Black bodies they perceive as their belongings (51). This severity of allegory links the history of colourism to that of enslavement, where mixed-race children would be ranked and priced based on their degree of 'whiteness'. This ranking is still in practise in adoption agencies, where mixed-race and lighter-skinned children are preferred over Black and dark-skinned mixed-race children (Moffitt 2020, 68). In a picture taken on the set (Figure 27; from an Instagram post by @rayanandtreysworld), the three children portraying the younger versions of the characters (Tiarna Williams, Isabelle Lewis and Rayan Toppin) pose behind a pillar. With the children together we can see a clearer progression in the children from proximity to whiteness to Blackness in hair colour and texture, facial features and skin colour, in the same order that they are preferred by their mother. Had the three siblings been styled with the same 'mix' of features, or had black,

afro-textured hair been shown as desirable rather than unwanted, the show would not be continuing the white supremacist tradition of portraying Blackness as negative. Ironically, the siblings are all light-skinned and feature 'desirable', 'designer' features: Éponine's red-brown hair and Gavroche's blond highlights are white traits that white mothers believe 'elevate' their childrens' Blackness (Bell 47; 49), and so even within these readings of anti-Blackness in the casting of Gavroche and Éponine against the less-visible Azelma, there remains the greater trend of only casting biracial children with clearly white traits in the most visible roles. In more closely allying the characters to whiteness we as an audience are expected to feel acceptably emotional about them: sympathy we are not asked to extend towards any other dark-skinned Black or brown person in the show.

While it could be argued that since the Thénardiers are intended to be the antagonists we as an audience are not supposed to endorse Madame Thénardier's colour-specific preferential treatment of her children, the production offers no alternate to the model, nor does it openly acknowledge that colour is the prevailing force behind her discrimination. An audience is thus left making their own judgements, witnessing (and accepting) that Éponine is the beautiful daughter and Azelma is not. If race were not intended to be a factor in Madame Thénardier's treatment of her children, the production could have opted to cast three children of completely different ethnic heritages: a Middle Eastern Éponine, a Southeast Asian Azelma and an Afro-Caribbean Gavroche. Whether or not Davies wrote the show with this intent, the decision to cast Akhtar, Coleman and the nine children in these roles after reading Davies' script reveals the irresponsibility that is inherent to 'colour-blind' casting.

THE PITIFUL WHITE BOYS

BBCMis' cultural consultant Robert Tombs argues that the legacy of slavery is less impactful on contemporary inequality than the 'sweat of English labourers' (Tombs "Virtue-Signalling"). This opinion is echoed by *BBCMis,* which posits that the people affected most by destitution in our contemporary era are working class white boys. In episode five we are briefly introduced to two children Davies names 'Little Boys'. While the majority of their scripted scenes have been cut, their importance to the show is elevated beyond their importance to the novel where they are a brief interlude about the fate of children forced to beg for food who are not brought up by grifters and who fade from the plot after becoming 'abandoned children' tumbling 'along the ground by the wind' (V,1.xvi,1000). After the emotional climax of Valjean's death in the penultimate scene of *BBCMis* we cut back to Paris, down to the muddy streets, where we see the Little Boys begging, their attempts futile when outstretching their novice arms to their fellow downtrodden Parisians. The final image of the show is a sobering one, intending to draw our attention back from the beauty of Cosette and Marius's marriage. Not all the Parisian poor have a Valjean to hand them obscene amounts of money as a saving grace, *BBCMis* says, before it cuts to the final credits and we are forced back into the contemporary world we live in.

These boys are, unbeknownst to all parties, Gavroche's biological younger siblings, sold off by their mother (IV,6,i,774). In a scene cut from the show, Gavroche refers to the boys as 'My little brothers' (Davies "Episode Six" 10-11), which implies that at one point the production did intend to make their relationship known, or to at least hint at it. Since *BBCMis'*s Little Boys as played by Ollie Harnett and Tommy Finnegan are both white boys, and assuming the casting director's awareness of their blood relationship, their relation to their brother is deemed unimportant to relate to the audience. This is a confusing

inconsistency within this family: in a truly 'colour blind' production such as the 1997 film

adaptation of *Cinderella*, a family need not appear to have a blood relationship in order to

read as a family to an audience (with the Black Whoopi Goldburg and white Victor Garber

producing Filipino Paolo Montalbán as a child). While we may suspend our disbelief in

BBCMis about the genealogical line between a South Asian father and three mixed-race

Black children, we are also now presented with two white children with no physical

resemblance to their three older siblings or Sotuh Asian parent. This casting falls into the

institution of racism we have explored so far where Gavroche, Éponine and Azelma are

undercut to balm the plight of their white counterparts; only of use when suffering or dead,

and not worthy of being the final breath of life on screen. As the final scene with the Little

Boys is a non-canonical one that Davies introduced, the show's final message about

inequality could have been shared by displaying Azelma as the last face on screen: begging,

but alive, and with the potential to live on to see adulthood. Even if we do not believe that

this ending would be a happy one, the humanisation of empathy falls to those who have

been overlooked through the show: Black women. This is not to say that working class white

boys do not face the burden of poverty with their counterparts of colour: indeed it is their

shared class status that means these boys and their siblings suffer from the same social

contexts of insufficient welfare, political negligence, and institutional violence. However we

must be mindful that there was a conscious decision within the producing team to make

these two specific Thénardier children white and not mixed-race. In doing so, *BBCMis* can

both capitalise on the visualisation of the suffering of Black people throughout the show

while simultaneously furthering the white supremacist narrative that ultimately it is the

white man who we must hold as our cultural standard. Because these white boys are still

suffering, *BBCMis* argues, and because white boys are the everyman we should all identify

with, it is evident that social inequality exists; not because of the Black bodies we have seen equally abused on screen throughout.

THE WHITE WORKING CLASS MAN

As often happens when the 'white working class' man is pitted against the person of colour in an attempt to use one against the other, both are used as tools, and both are failed by the misrepresentation. This is part of an ongoing unwillingness to 'understand revolution in terms of class warfare' (Brombert 136), and as is important to remember, 'the idea of racial hierarchy and the attendant philosophy of innate white superiority were not invented by poor people, and while we are not excusing the central role that everyday racism has played in upholding racial hierarchies in the UK and elsewhere, our critique should not rest there' but with those who create the systems and profit from them (Akala 12). In an interview with the Guardian, Davies states:

> "People are taking to the streets in Paris right now, but the inequalities are here in Britain too. And you wonder if anything has been learned. We had a very grand BBC launch in Piccadilly and it was pouring with rain and you had beggars sitting there on the wet pavement with nothing as we tiptoed past them in our best clothes and went in for a champagne reception." He seems momentarily troubled. "There is a huge irony there. I see it, but I don't know what can be done" (Drury, *The Guardian*).

I find the editorialising here to be especially poignant. When considering the inequalities of his contemporary world, Davies can look 'momentarily troubled' before stating that he has no plan on how to address this inequality. The phrasing of 'what can be done' is an impersonal and passive one, removing any personal pronoun and thus responsibility from

himself. Unlike Ly, for whom art as activism was a priority and was couched in the language of a shared "we", Davies wrote his adaptation from the perspective closer in status to the bourgeoise of the show. This fundamental rift between the BBC adaptation and a genuine critique of contemporary inequality comes from the relationship between the writer and whose perspective is being assumed in the story. In a podcast with Masterpiece, the co-producers of the show, Davies enjoys that his Valjean is perceived as 'raging':

> [My] first encounter with Les Misérables was when I was a little boy, […] and I saw, you know this poor Bishop, here comes this this terrifying figure who's, you know, hardly human. He is so rough and so rude. And I found it quite hard to understand the behaviour of the Bishop and also the behaviour of Jean Valjean after the Bishop been so kind. You know, I thought surely he should be terribly grateful. Instead he robs the Bishop and then the Bishop not only forgives him, but gives him more things. And that that that kind of puzzled me. But that I wanted to, I don't know, preserve that sense of and it comes across in the book I think of how frightened people are of Valjean (Lacob, *PBS*).

Thus begins the treatment of this white, working class man and his new characterisation as an ungrateful, inherently violent person, which fits into Akala's anecdotal observation that most people 'it seems to me at least, hate poor people more than they hate poverty' and ignore how 'even "bad" decisions are made in context' (18). Davies's Valjean is noticeably less kind in *BBCMis* than in the novel or in other adaptations, and this is rooted in Davies's reading of the candlesticks scene as a child. While Davies describes Valjean as being 'rough and so rude', the Valjean of the novel is the direct antithesis: on being treated with

kindness, Valjean is a quiet and reserved man who becomes overwhelmed with positive emotion towards the Bishop.

> The expression on his face, till then glum and hard, shifted from stupefaction to doubt, then to joy, and finally became extraordinary. He started to stammer like a madman: "True? You mean it! You mean you'll keep me? You're not chasing me away? A convict! And you call me monsieur! You don't talk down to me! Get lost, you cur! everybody else always says. [...] You really don't want me to go! You are wonderful people! Anyhow, I've got the money. I'll pay well. Pardon me, Monsieur Innkeeper, what's your name? I'll pay all you want. You're a good man" (I,2,iii,64-5).

Hugo chooses to characterise Valjean as being polite in spite of his resentment of society. Davies' reading of the novel is closer to the bigoted assumptions the town members of Digne make about the man they see as a violent criminal than to the Bishop, who not only calls Valjean 'brother' but treats him as one. As the Bishop says: 'If you come out of such a painful place full of hate and rage against men, you are worthy of pity; if you come out full of goodwill, gentleness, and peace, you are worth more than any of us' (I,2,iii,66). The purpose of the episode between Valjean and the Bishop is to overturn the misconception that people with a conviction history are 'hardly human' terrifying figures who harass 'innocent' Bishops. Valjean is so unused to the kindness that he incriminates himself, multiple times, out of fear that to keep his identity secret would only harm him, and yet the Bishop refuses to treat him like a villain. This chain reaction is what allows Valjean to grow into the man he becomes. Davies chooses to ignore this in favour of the very reading Hugo was trying to abolish from his readers' minds. The patronising tone that Davies takes in suggesting that Valjean should have been grateful for the Bishop's kindness is reticent of the

rhetoric of those like Policing Minster Chris Philp, whose comments raised during criticism of refugee centres echoed Davies' attitude that people should be 'terribly grateful' to receive anything at all (Dunne, *Standard*). Hugo's Bishop believes that as someone who was previously-Aristocratic and who now chooses poverty, he should distribute any wealth he receives: 'Large sums passed through his hands, but nothing could make him change his style of life in the slightest or get him to embellish his spartan existence by the faintest touch of the superfluous' (I,1,ii,9). The silverware the Bishop donates to Valjean is only given after a period of self-reflection on the Bishop's part where he realises he is in fact hoarding wealth from his past by keeping the candlesticks, and as he tells Madame Magloire: 'I was wrong to hang on to that silver— and for so long. It belonged to the poor. What was [Valjean]? He was poor, evidently"' (I,2,xii,88). Far from being of the opinion that Valjean is a rude thug who ungratefully makes off with his wealth, the Bishop goes through a period of self-education about his still-held misconceptions about the prison system and about his relationship with money, and is thankful for Valjean's presence in continuing his self-betterment. Should *BBCMis* have included the Bishop's backstory or aspects of his community efforts, the audience (like Hugo's bourgeois reader) might have gained a mentor like Valjean does, guiding their own actions towards class-defying solidarity.

Instead of confronting his beliefs about criminality, Davies doubles down on them, creating a *criminal* Valjean who is rough, rude and thuggish. This Valjean is both physically more violent for violence's sake and is, even post-Bishop, incredibly rude. When we are first introduced to Valjean in *BBCMis*, we do not see the origin story of Hugo's: that Valjean was imprisoned for stealing food to feed his sister's children, nor indeed the humanising scenes of his secretly paying for their milk to get them out of trouble (I,2,vi,71-2). Davies writes

Valjean a new scene to introduce us to him, in which he attempts to crush a guard under a boulder (Davies "Episode One" 5). When deterring Thénardier from following him and Cosette to Paris, instead of following the novel in which Valjean silently dissuades Thénardier with a 'dark look' (II,3,x,355), Valjean violently attacks Thénardier, forcing him to his knees by the scruff of his neck and coming close to killing him in front of Cosette. *BBCMis*' Valjean is a misogynist, treating the women around him with disdain with throwaway lines like "now bring me my supper, woman!" (Davies "Episode Three" 18) and laughing at Cosette's calling their landlady a "nosey old bitch" (Davies "Episode Three" 35). When he is Mayor of Montreuil-sur-Mer in Hugo's novel, Valjean is distant but still crafts small toys from straw and coconut for the local children to play with (I,5,iii,139), and helps his townsfolk grow financially with his knowledge from his time as farm-hand and prisoner (I,5,iii,138). By creating an industry in the town that is bent on kindness and that provides education for the town's children, Valjean does not attempt to plaster over visible poverty by giving alms, but attempts to solve financial inequality from its root, attempting to create a better working society than he has had to survive in. After stealing the coin from Petit Gervais, Valjean makes a point to treat every savoyard with the respect of asking for their name and giving them coin as a point of penance (I,5,v,142). *BBCMis* retains the money-giving aspect but not the penance. Instead of the genial conversation Valjean has with Gavroche, in which Gavroche is stirred by Valjean's words and because 'he had just noticed that the man talking to him had no hat and that inspired his confidence' (IV,15,ii,951), and Valjean's subsequent horror at himself for what 'smacked of stealing' Cosette's letter (IV,15,iii,953), the BBC's Valjean rips the letter from Gavroche's hand, yelling at him to 'Hop it! Hop it!', apparently feeling nothing at either the theft, the unwarranted verbal abuse or the threat of physical violence (Davies "Episode Six" 57). *BBCMis* here chooses stagnancy in

this white criminal, where happiness is apparently only achieved by aggressively holding on until you are the last to survive.

"BLACK JAVERT"

Javert is played by the actor David Oyelowo, and it is this casting that brought the most attention to the 'colour-blind' casting of the show. As the Daily Mail put it, the show has 'broken new ground by casting a black actor […] as Javert' (Blott and Smith). This ground has previously been 'broken' by the admittedly small group of Black stage actors Cornell John (2005 West End), Norm Lewis (West End, 2006 Broadway Revival, 25th Anniversary Concert), Brian Stokes Mitchell (2008 Hollywood Bowl) and Shaq Taylor (2018 West End understudy), though David Oyelowo is the first Black man to portray Javert in a screen adaptation. This was not the first time that 'colour-blind' casting has come under debate when Oyelowo has been cast in a role. Oyelowo was the first Black actor to be cast as an English king when he played Henry VI in the RSC's 2000 production, and although 'his performance was highly acclaimed, debates about his right to play the role demonstrated an unease that suggests that audiences and critics were not completely 'blind' to colour or to associations between race and role' (Goddard 2017, 85). After 18 years, Oyelowo was still seen to be 'taking' a white role by playing Javert, his Blackness trumping his ability to be seen as a fictional French policeman.

In interviews, Oyelowo calls negative reactions to his being cast in the role 'selective outrage', pointing out that 'no one seemed much to mind that the French peasants in the miniseries speak Cockney and that iconic scenes play out on London streets' (McManus, *SMH*). The selective outrage was evident on Twitter:

'I saw a version of Les Mis! Javert was Black! Victor Hugo would be amazed?

Everything screwed up with BAME now, to the point of incredulity' (@henrywesto)

'So [enforced diversity quotas] is an anti-White and demonstrably pro-ethnic.

Diversity isn't skewing the population. It should reflect it. 20% does not. I mean could

you have someone "black up" for a part these days? No. But a black Javert is OK in

Les Mis is fine. Really? Time to #DefundTheBBC.' [sic] (@AliceClarr)

'Last year we were expected to accept a black Javert in Les Miserables'

(@SeverencePlease)

'Hear, hear! As good as an actor as David Olewello [sic] is, there's no way Javert in

LeMiz could have ever been Black and it didn't work. This kind of woke casting is

dumbing down these historical projects and I have a feeling it's only going to get

worse.' (@martgarrison)

From this small sampling we can see a familiar group of arguments decrying the end of

white art and white history at the hands of diversity quotas, written with the rote, feigned

respectability of the outraged, history-preserving conservative. As Goddard states, casting

practises that include non-white performers 'raise questions about access and cultural

ownership' for white audiences, with issues around race and casting becoming more

prominent with authors (such as Shakespeare and Hugo) because of 'conflicts with ideas

about the cultural legacy' and 'supposed universality' of their works (2017, 82). When

coveted roles such as Javert are 'given' to non-white actors, there is a perception of

overstepping a boundary, of infringing into territory that has been exclusively the domain of

the white. Yet Oyelowo's casting also spawned tweets like ones from user Alex Harrison,

who attempts to defend the casting by referencing the French colonial rule, creating a backstory for Javert:

> Black Javert is a possibly brilliant casting choice, though. I hope we get a dramatic flashback to the Haitian Revolution at some point. (@AlecSaracen)

We presume from this tweet that in Harrison's envisioning of *LM*, Javert's parents escape or are emancipated from enslavement and make their way to France, where Javert grows up. In giving a historical anchor for Javert's Blackness, Harrison voices the anxiety that casting needs to be historically rooted, yet still presumes Black people only existed as slaves in nineteenth-century France.

Despite bigoted twitter users' beliefs that 'woke' casting 'screwed up' and 'dumbed down' the series with a Black Javert, Oyelowo does, above all else, play a policeman. On being asked by BBC Africa presenter Ōkwóchè whether Oyelowo believed his upbringing helped his characterisation of Javert, Oyelowo laughs hard before answering 'in terms of who and what Javert is, I'd like to think he is one of the least characters who is like me' (@BBCAfrica). Oyelowo goes on to say that he had a richly international, multi-cultural upbringing between the UK, Nigeria and the USA, but it is clear from his laughter that this is a tactful diversion from his instinctual answer to differentiate between his childhood as a British Nigerian boy and an abusive French policeman. While Oyelowo can play a role where the 'challenge' is presenting Javert as someone who is not 'just the villain' but a well-rounded character (@BBCAfrica), he is only one man. The casting does not sit isolated from the overall show or of the world the show was put out into. Jon Hatter makes this point explicit by reversing the casting of David Oyelowo and Dominic West:

I think if Valjean had been black, a bunch of Americans would have cheered for

Javert...

On further reflection, he probably never would have met Javert. He would have

probably been shot because the arresting officer "thought the loaf of bread was a

weapon." (@JonHatter)

What Hatter's tweet perceives is how accepted this thought process is: that we as a

contemporary society in the UK and US have become numb to how easily Black men can be

killed for any reason, and that a loaf of bread is no more absurd a reason than loose

cigarettes or a wallet. It is irresponsible to believe that a certain percentage of the BBC's

audience *would not* cheer for a white Javert hunting a Black Valjean, and so we must

investigate what this same audience receives with the opposite.

BBCMIS' INSPECTOR JAVERT

The novel Javert's hyper-focused personality comes from his disdain for criminals as

informed by his parents' backgrounds and his subsequent upbringing in the care of the legal

system (I,5,v,144). *BBCMis* Javert's obsession is warped to be a singular focus on his

personal hatred of Valjean, who he deems to be the mastermind behind every criminal

occurrence in France, from the abduction of children right up to the June Rebellions (Davies

"Episode One" 7). Unlike the novel we are given only one throwaway line as to Javert's

personal history: 'I was born in prison. My parents were criminals' (Davies "Episode Five" 1),

and so we must look for why Javert believes Valjean to be his greatest enemy. As both Hugo

and the BBC's Javert's tell their Valjeans, they are twin spirits born in similar circumstances

but raised different: one into criminality, one into Justice. In mirroring scenes in the show,

Javert and Valjean emerge from Toulon prison into their new lives, one as a previously

incarcerated free man and one as a young prison guard turned police officer, and yet both

are treated with the same scorn by their new societies. Valjean has a brief stint as a manual

labourer in Digne carrying heavy wine barrels, and despite doing an obviously better job

than his fellow labourers, he is underpaid because he can be visually identified as an ex-

convict by his shorn hair, brands and clothing. Javert arrives at Paris to ask his supervisor to

allow him to investigate the suspicious Mayor Madeleine, but as he walks into the room, the

precinct silences. Every man in the room stops what they are doing to turn and face Javert

(Figure 28), one man leaning against a table, jeering as he weighs a baton in his hand: an

obvious threat (Figure 29). This physical reaction to Javert's entrance is not one written into

the script (Davies "Episode Two" 36-7), which implies that director Tom Shankland chose to

add this animosity after the casting of Oyelowo as Javert. We are given no reason for this

animosity and so we are left with the only visible indicator of difference: Javert's being a

Black man in this sea of white masculinity. This scene becomes our foundational idea of why

Javert is so desperate to continue hunting Valjean through his career: after intruding in

white society and being turned away by them, he gains honour by being correct about

accusing Mayor Madeleine. The next time we see Javert in the precinct he has risen to stand

behind the desk he was discriminated at, and we understand that the Madeleine case was

instrumental to his being accepted into the fold. Valjean becomes Javert's barometer of his

place in the world. So long as Valjean is free, Javert's position in society is an unstable one.

His job, the respect he holds, even his life will come crashing back down at the whim of

Valjean's comings and goings. Without the novel-borne backstory that centres justice,

Javert's life holds no stakes other than how society perceives him because of his racial

identity.

Figure 28 A shot from BBCMIS. In a slightly smoky, dimly lit office, a group of white men stare as Javert, a Black man, enters. We look on the scene from behind a desk set at the head of the room.

Figure 219 A shot from BBCMIS. A white man rests against a table, tapping his cudgel in one hand as he looks off-screen.

There is also no racial solidarity depicted between any Black characters in the show. There is, in fact, more intraracial violence than support, which creates an uncomfortable fictional world of Black characters who prefer to surround themselves with white people. As the adage 'not all skinfolk are kinfolk' argues, people of all races uphold bigotry and to assume otherwise is dangerous. Javert does not break his cop-mentality to remove his skin-folk Gavroche from his abusive parents in the show, and in later life, Gavroche levels his gun at Javert, laughing at his fear. While this could have been used as a productive insight into the use of racial politics to pay for a feeling of relative safety, where people of colour align

themselves with an oppressor in order to gain individual preferential treatment (Rankine 282; hooks 2015, 77), this is not explored in the show, and we are left instead with the assertion that 'Black on Black' violence is an objective reality. *BBCMis* then furthers this in its choice to give Javert Hugo's interest in criminal physiognomy, craniology and phrenology, practises well known for proliferating scientific racism:

> proponents [of phrenology] argued that certain functions could be directly mapped onto the size and shape of the brain and skull – comparable ideas [that] continually resurfaced in racial classification theory (Redman 30-1).

We get extended shots of Javert's desk, focusing on the labelled skull he keeps beside him as he considers Valjean's case, seemingly considering what part of this labelled skull separates them as humans (Figure 30). When making a facial composite of Valjean for his wanted poster, Javert points desperately at his reference book of human facial difference (Figure 31), shouting at the graphic artist to make Valjean's 'jawline more prognathous – you see here?' (Davies "Episode Three" 36). Javert's interest in a practise that racialized criminality is a perverse one. Neither Hugo nor any other adaptation has given any white Javert this interest, but 'The First Black Javert' is seen to be pioneering what will eventually become the taxonomic criminalisation of Black people. In much the same way that the phrase 'Black on Black crime' is intended to divert attention from white institutions to avoid their own responsibility in creating the inequality that leads to crime, Oyelowo's Javert is shown at the dawn of modern-day racial profiling, relying on racial taxonomy to ensure his success within the institution. Given time to unpick this, the show might have made some fascinating insight into how minorities have had to operate within racist workplaces in order to gain respect or safety. Without that time, this depiction becomes a simple echo of and

enshrinement of racist police tactics (Yee 2016, 168). One Black fan recalls Javert's use of phrenology with a sense of shock:

> for real for real yall went and pulled out a book of facial features for your police sketch of Valjean […] I RECOGNIZE THAT BOOK […] IVE SEEN THAT PICTURE […] THAT PICTURE WAS OF AFRICAN FEATURES AND THE NIGGA YALL DREW LOOKS NOTHING LIKE THAT SO YOU KNOW IT WAS RACIST […] AND WHY WOULD YOU BE REFERENCING AFRO FEATURES IF JAVERT KNOWS [Valjean is] NOT BLACK- (@imhereandhistorical)[17]

As @imhereandhistorical points out, despite searching for a white man, the example of criminal physiognomy that Javert and his sketch-artist are drawing from is that of a Black man with a low brow ridge, flat face and pronounced lips. Dominic West has a pronounced nose, deep-set eyes, thin lips and a high brow ridge, and despite using the side-on profile that highlights brow and nose height, the final composite is a front-on profile image (Figure 32). Even while actively hunting for a white suspect, criminality as a trait is codified as intrinsically, biologically Black. This is an obtuse oversight by a production that does not question how race can and does interact with institutions like the police and broadcasting companies, and is a useful indicator of how, even outside of the writer and director, racism is perpetuated by creative teams who are undereducated about racial histories and stereotypes.

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[17] I have chosen not to censor @imhereandhistorical's word choice here because she is Black and I am not.

Figure 30 A shot from BBCMIS. We look over Javert's shoulder at his desk, where he is reading a document. Prominent on the desk is a phrenology skull. It is the same desk as Figure 28.
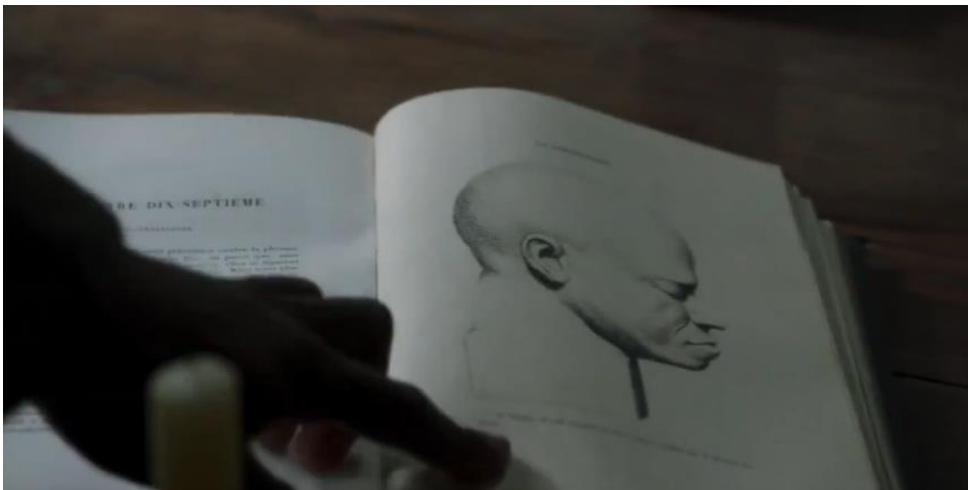

Figure 31 A shot from BBCMIS. Javert points to a page of a phrenology book. On it is depicted a side-profile sketch of a Black man.

Figure 222 A shot from BBCMIS. Javert holds up a pencil sketch of a front-facing Jean Valjean as played by Dominic West.

The BBC's Javert is not a racist portrayal in the same way Montparnasse's is, in that a

Black man is not shown to be an animalistic, savage criminal, but he is the product of a

majority-white creative team at a majority-white production company made for air by majority-white broadcasting company. Through the process between scripting to casting, filming, editing and then airing, Javert was transformed from Javert into Black Javert. Even in a world in which we are to believe that race is less important than talent, Black Javert's goals are racially motivated, his existence reliant on white acceptance. Black Javert does not have a Black community and is utterly hostile to any other Black person he meets, all of whom he deems criminal. Even after rising in rank, he hires no other Black person to his police force, and his only allies are white. Despite the most vocally bigoted tweets decrying a Black man's taking a 'white' role, thus allegedly forcing a 'pro-ethnic' mentality on white audiences, *BBCMis*'s Javert is an attempt at a 'colour-blind' one that at once denies him joy at being a Black man, and has him ritualistically criminalise all other Black people. In this way, *BBCMis'*s Javert is a more insidious type of racism, one that disguises itself behind the 15% diversity quota he was borne of.

CRIMINAL QUEERNESS

Just as *BBCMis* uses non-whiteness to indicate villainy, so too does the show use queerness to the same effect. We can see Davies' beliefs on queerness in the only canonical instance of queer people in the show, again at *La Chaumière*, the oriental-influenced club. As Davies describes it:

> PEOPLE are dancing, some quite normally - but one or two COUPLES are indulging in shameless frottage. There are several TRANSVESTITES, but we don't see this immediately. […] We can see [Marius'] FRIENDS among the DANCERS, and now we can fully register the louche dancing styles, and the SAME-SEX COUPLES, and also see

> PICKPOCKETS at work, male and female – […] MARIUS'S shocked gaze. But MARIUS is
>
> being observed as well. Quite nearby stand a couple of menacing heavies. One gives
>
> him a little smile and shows his knife. MARIUS horrified. Is he being threatened, or is
>
> this dandyish thug inviting complicity? (Davies "Episode Four" 31-2, emphasis
>
> Davies').

The scene is written to have a dawning horror to it: at first, we are greeted by what is

'normal': couples dancing as they might in a club but then we, like Marius, are confronted

by the sudden appearance of inappropriate sexuality, and quick on its heels is queerness.

Davies' use of the word 'normal' to set the scene of heterosexual clubbing denotes that the

other side of the spectrum is the shock of even *seeing* a 'transvestite'. These 'transvestites'

are not performing any action in the script, are simply placed as objects of visual horror to

be noticed. By interspersing queer people among the pickpockets and the 'menacing

heavies' holding knives, Davies is creating a space in which queerness is conflated with

criminality and moral destitution. *La Chaumière* is not a safe space for queer people to be

queer, but where all members of the non-normative spectrum are painted with the same

brush: sexual, dangerous, criminal. While the 'transvestites' and 'homosexuals' can be ogled

at with long, slow shots, the club is a visual threat to Marius' identity and safety. This is

headed by the last member of *La Chaumière* we are introduced to, the dandyish thug, who

is both a queer and a criminal, which Marius is both confused and horrified by. The cis-

white-straight-male Marius, the writer with the same identity, and the audience Davies is

writing for cannot be safe in this dangerous place. The way that *La Chaumière* is described is

relic-like in its trans- and homophobia. While this language could be blamed on the

historical setting, the term 'transvestite' is alleged to have been coined in 1910 by Magnus

Hirschfeld in his book *Die Transvestiten,* and as such the use of it is anachronistic for the time period. Though some people self-describe as 'transvestite', it is generally seen as an antiquated term that is often used derogatorily towards transgender people. The uncredited extra cast in the part (a wide-jawed, bare-chested white person wearing their long hair in rollers), sits within the well-worn representation of transgender women and/or crossdressers in the media consciousness (Figure 33).
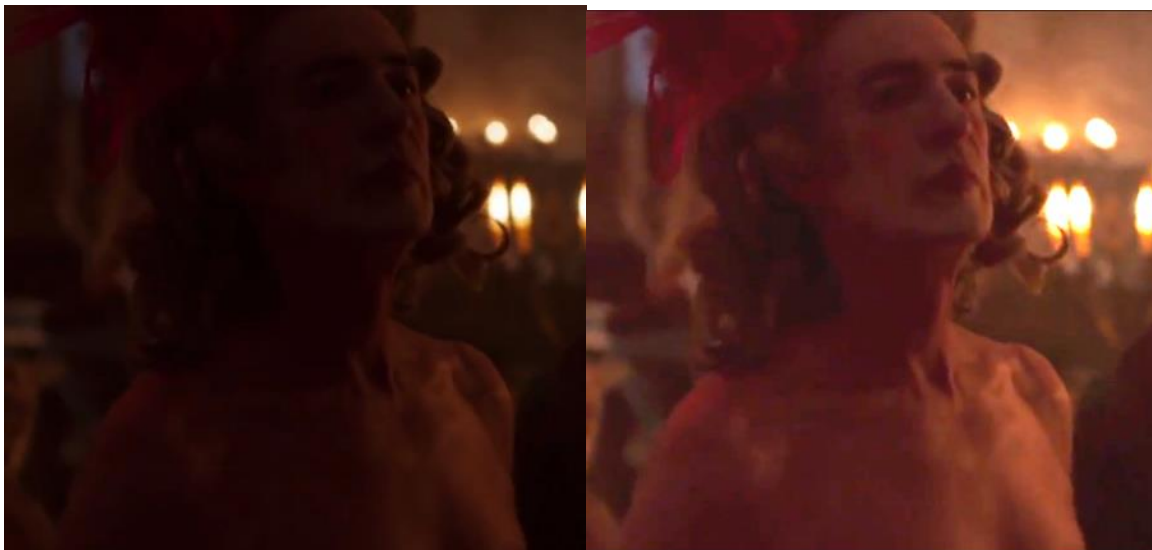

Figure 33 A shot from BBCMIS – on the left with original lighting and on the right with the exposure turned up. In a dark room lit by candles, a middle-aged white person with a bare chest stands, defiant. They have rouge on their cheeks and a feather in their curled blonde hair.

I reference here the shooting script, which is the final draft of a script as used on set. Scripts typically go through multiple revisions before this, with script supervisors (in this case Elizabeth Alexandris, Camille Arpajou, Kevin Van Roy), script producers (Will Johnston, Laura Lankester) and script editors (Agnes Meath Baker) clearing the final draft for production. Scripts may then have edits on the day of shooting, or be cut on the editor's table, and these would not be reflected here. It is almost incredible that this description made it through not only the first draft of a prime-time BBC drama but to the shooting script without being questioned for its language use or its implications. The fact that neither Davies nor any editor nor consultant at the BBC interrogated the use of this term in the

script fits with the institution-wide transphobia prevalent at the BBC, which in 2020 dropped its support for pro-transgender charities (Brown, *The Times*) and has banned presenters from supporting transgender rights by claiming 'impartiality' (Waterston, *The Guardian 29;* 30 October). Davies' writing containing the use of a transphobic slur and homophobic implications is not particularly impartial, and the script exposes a lack of care about this. While the production contains no filmed use of slurs, they are hidden in the scripts, which have only recently been uploaded to the BBC's script archive. It is likely that these scripts were never expected to be read by anyone outside of the production, and so were not so closely examined or consulted on. While on-screen representation through the casting of non-normative actors may be one sign of progress, moments like this exemplify how true diversity cannot be achieved without education through all departments, including at least one script supervisor with trans awareness training.

QUEER LOVE BAD

Most obviously queercoded is the antagonistic relationship between Javert and Valjean, which Davies was adamant on raising in the majority of the interviews he undertook about the show:

> Perhaps the biggest question was how to represent the sexuality of its two principal characters [… Davies] was surprised to discover that, in Hugo's 1862 novel, neither character mentions any sort of sexual experience, leaving the 82-year-old screenwriter wondering, at least in the case of Javert, whether it was indicative of a latent homosexuality. [...] "His obsession with Jean Valjean represents a kind of

perverse, erotic love," Davies says (Lawrence, *Telegraph*).

While it may be argued that the 'perverse' love that Davies is referring to is the perversion

of the abuse of power inherent in a guard overzealously pursuing a previously-incarcerated

person, it is clear whenever Davies re-iterates himself that Davies believes it is the

homosexuality that is, in fact, the perversion: 'Davies said he thought Javert pursued his

former captor and "he may possibly even be in love with him in a strange way"' (Conlan,

Guardian).

> Valjean and Javert both seemed to be virgins, which is so extraordinary. You know,
>
> two mature men, and we don't have any account of either of them having a loving
>
> relationship or a sexual relationship. Maybe sex is unimportant to Javert. And then
>
> having met Jean Valjean, he gets so annoyed with him that this develops into a kind
>
> of obsession, which is like a twisted love affair (Jace, *Masterpiece*).

I will discuss later how contemporary fanfiction considers the 'chaste', 'virginial' Valjean

(II,4,iii,363) and Javert's 'life of deprivation, isolation, self-denial, chastity' (I,5,v,145),

ranging from theories of religious celibacy through to current understandings of asexuality

as a sexual orientation, but it is clear that Davies does not consider either of these as

options when the 'norm' that is 'perverted' is sex between anyone who is not a cisgender

man and woman. As Davies states: 'I did toy with the idea of letting Javert have loveless sex

with a 50-year-old prostitute just as a matter of cleaning the pipes out' (Hughes, *i news*).

Davies' phrasing here is especially key: he talks of 'letting' Javert have heterosexual sex, to

free him from the non-heteronormative sexless-identity that Hugo has created for him. By

allowing Javert to clean out his pipes, Davies holds a position of power in which he considers

himself courteous by redressing the 'perversion' that is implied by his canonical chastity,

while wielding heterosexual sex (with an undesirable figure) as punishment for his implied queerness. The specificity of referring to a '50-year-old' sex worker implies that Javert would opt for a woman who is, (in this 82-year-old screenwriter's opinion), past her prime suggests that this would be an act of self-hatred. If this age were not intended to indicate a lack of value (likely to elicit a sense of vulgar humour), Davies would not have included it. Davies would thus rather his character be depicted as having self-hating sex for a dual comedic/disgust effect than to show Javert having (pleasurable) sex with a similarly-aged gay man and/or male sex worker, implying that Davies believes the root of Javert's perverse sexuality is a (repressed) homosexuality, not asexuality. While it would not necessarily be progressive to have a self-hating, canonically gay man complete suicide (as Javert does) after we have witnessed his being in a pleasurable sexual relationship with a man, Javert *is* still coded as being a 'latent homosexual', and violently in the closet as one.

Davies resorts to channelling Javert's 'strange' love through his obsession with Valjean, giving it a distinctly homoerotic bent. When Valjean is released from the prison on parole, he is ordered to strip out of his prison uniform and stands in Javert's office, naked. While he does so, Javert averts his eyes to his desk but then, for a moment, looks up. From his shiftiness it is implied that Javert is sneaking a look and is ashamed to do so; that this is a private desire not an officer's duty. For this first hint at Javert's 'love' to be both an abuse of power and something Javert is clearly ashamed about desiring is very much in line with how homosexuality has been equated with being 'perverse', a bad habit that the repressed homosexual cannot help but indulge in. Javert's obsession from this initial spark of physical interest in another man's naked body builds, linking physical, sexual desire with Javert's drive to subjugate Valjean. Here, obsession with inappropriate sexual desire and an

overwhelm of shame are the sole markers of queerness. As I will consider later, fans also

explore the homosexual relationship between Valjean and Javert, where inappropriate

power dynamics form part of the language of desire. These relationships do, however, often

also attempt to question 'mainstream assumptions about gender, sexuality, and desire'

(Coppa 21), and are part of a communal reclamation of Javert into a queerness that centres

love, support and growth. Though repression through external forces of homophobia are of

course not period inappropriate, it once again assigns a tragic, unfulfilled and inappropriate

sexual desire to a man of colour: part of Thénardier's trafficked children, *La Chaumière*'s

knife-wielding transsexuals, and Marius's dream about 'the wrong girl' Éponine, not to the

romantic, day-lit cis-heterosexuality of Marius and Cosette.

Javert is also given a relationship with a non-novel borne secondary character,

Rivette (Enzo Cilenti), who acts as the Watson to Javert's Sherlock; essentially a mouthpiece

to ask Javert questions, thus externalising Javert's thought process to us. Rivette often

morphs from being an officer asking his superior for next steps to a man asking another man

his intimate thoughts and often stepping across the line from colleague to *partner*. Rivette

begins by asking his superior: 'did you see him? The one you're after?'. When Javert reveals

Valjean freed Javert at the barricade, Rivette nervously jokes: 'Must have a soft spot for you,

Sir.' In response, Javert squares up to Rivette, asking 'Are you mocking me?'. Rivette glances

down, then up, scanning Javert's face, says 'No, Sir' (Davies "Episode Six" 21). This strange

exchange, which has no purpose in conveying new information to the audience, sets up a

relationship dynamic in which Rivette, who had previously been a fairly generic and

characterless vehicle for exposition, is seen to have wants of his own: namely a more

personal relationship with Javert. Rivette's comments to Javert about Valjean (inferring that

Javert might have more feelings for Valjean than strictly business ones) echo the role Éponine plays to Marius and Cosette, the jealous third-wheel jabbing at the other to attract attention to themself. Javert responding with an aggressive 'Are you mocking me' implies a man who has more often had to defend his position and his masculinity from accusations of homosexuality (possibly due to a lack of visible heterosexuality in the form of a female partner), rather than a man who can recognise a fellow subtly asking if Javert shares a sexuality. Rivette's scanning Javert's face suggests a man who has gathered evidence and worked up the courage to out himself, only for it to put him in an immediate danger he had not anticipated. In their next scene together they are alone in a carriage heading to the sewers they believe the Thénardiers will be at. The camera focuses on Rivette while he takes a long, longing look at Javert, as if internally debating his next move. Rivette's teasing of Javert and his lingering looks mirror Éponine's playfully taunting Marius, and of her consistently daring Marius to look at her, to draw Marius's attention away from Cosette (Valjean), with whom Marius (Javert) is besotted. In their private carriage, Rivette considers whether he has made himself and his affection clear, and whether now Javert has a better sense that he, Rivette, is a better object of romance than the unattainable Valjean. Rivette makes a decision, and reaches over to fix Javert's collar with a quiet 'If you would permit me, sir?' (*Ibid* 22). This action, which Davies refers to in the script as 'tender', is immediately swatted away by an incensed Javert, and a mortified Rivette apologises – but for an extended moment their hands remain linked and their eyes linger – until Javert again looks away (*Ibid*). Rivette and Éponine are unable to see how they could be wrong in their assumptions that they are a welcome alternate person to love to the unattainable Valjean and Cosette, but just as Éponine is startled to realise that Marius doesn't 'understand *anything'* (Davies "Episode Five", 8, Davies' emphasis), Rivette is shocked to discover that

Javert would not choose intimacy with him – a friend and equal – over Valjean, who both

policemen believe to be a violent criminal.

Rivette's question is one that has been repurposed, originally asked in the novel by

Grantaire to Enjolras. In a chapter titled 'Orestes on a fast and Pylades drunk' (referring to

the Ancient Greek heroes widely used throughout Hellenophile literature as a euphemism

for a homosexual couple (Robb 2005, 144)), Grantaire awakes just as a firing squad is about

to assassinate Enjolras and goes to stand beside him for their final moments together.

> Et, se tournant vers Enjolras avec douceur, il lui dit: / Permets-tu?
>
> Enjolras lui serra la main en souriant. Ce sourire n'était pas achevé que la détonation
>
> éclata' (*LM* 1081)

> [And, turning to Enjolras gently, he said to him: "All right with you?"
>
> Enjolras shook his hand with a smile. He was still smiling when the explosion ripped
>
> through the silence] (V,1,xxiii,1026)

BBCMis only gives Grantaire the line: "Wait a minute. Me too" (Davies "Episode Six"

16), not allowing this moment of cautious relationship-checking between them. Grantaire's

"Permets-tu?" and Enjolras' silent but affirmative response is a relief to a reader of the

novel, who has witnessed as Grantaire has been consistently rejected by Enjolras until this

moment. Rivette's similar question bears in it reminders of the Enjolras and Grantaire

relationship that was mostly stripped out of the BBC adaptation, and is positioned similarly:

in the quiet moment before the final battle, imbuing in it an additional, metatextual legacy

of queer longing. An audience member who recognises the line may thus have some

positive expectation for the outcome, where a previously disinterested character relents to

provide a bitter-sweet ending. Enjolras and Javert may still die, but in their final moments they could have chosen to exist in a more tender world. It could be argued that this scene is placed by Davies to show that not all homosexuality is perverse; we do, after all, sympathise with the care Rivette extends as we do with Éponine, and this scene attempts to explain that Javert's infatuation is not corrupt because he is gay, but because he is obsessed with the 'wrong' person. If this was the intent, however, it gets buried behind the execution. In what is a one-minute scene, a previously-characterless now-gay-Rivette is forcefully slapped away by Javert, who growls 'take your hands off me'. This miscommunication between them is not talked of again, and Rivette returns to being an audience proxy, his use as an intimate no longer desired. Javert remains a tragic figure, and one whose mostly-coincidental impact on Valjean's life in the novel is transformed into a product of a dangerous homosexuality intent on devouring a (heterosexual) Valjean. As I will argue further in Chapter Four, while Davies interprets Javert's asexuality as repressed homosexuality, he makes Valjean's heterosexuality. Both are positioned as inappropriate, both sneaking looks at the object of their desire, and both die without 'winning' the object of their affection. In the narrative, the incestuous father and the homosexual man are made equivalents, and both must be removed from society in order for the correct heterosexual couple to succeed.

CONCLUSION

Over the summer of 2020, several signs from Black Lives Matter protests went viral. One of them is a photo of a couple who hold up two signs that read 'When you don't "see color" [...] you can't see patterns' (Figure 34). The sign seems to be a riff on a meme from the Family Guy episode 'Turban Cowboy' in which the white protagonist Peter Griffin, who has dressed himself as 'a Muslim' to join a suspected terrorist attack, is stopped by the police.

The cop holds a chart up towards Griffin, which is split into two: three light skin tones

labelled as 'okay', and three dark skin tones labelled 'not okay' (Figure 35). This meme is

often brought out on social media whenever a white man is transformed into a sweet,

misunderstood child by news sources after committing acts of domestic terrorism. Both of

these signs attempt to debunk the idea of colour-blindness as a positive phrase.

Figure 34 A photograph of two white people holding up signs. Together they read 'When you don't "see color" … you can't see patterns'. On the left sign are white boxes labelled "respected by police" and "murdered by police". On the right side, below "respected by police" are light-coloured pink skin colour swatches. Under "murdered by police" are brown skin colour swatches.

Figure 235 A shot from an episode of Family Guy. Peter Griffin, dressed in a Fez, is in a car. An arm holds up a sign. Next to 'okay' are three pink skintones. Under 'not okay' are three brown skintones.

If you were to hold a colour chart up to the cast of BBCMis, you would find that there are only two exceptions to the rule of darker skin equalling 'not okay'. These two exceptions are both Black women. One of them, Toussaint (Angela Wynter), is Valjean's housemaid, whose only role is to wait on her white charge, Cosette. Toussaint wears her hair in a headscarf wrapped turban-style as Wynter does, which is the show's only costume evocation of a culture outside of white, French dress. The second is Sister Simplice (Natalie Simpson), who nurses the white Fantine in hospital and who helps to smuggle Valjean and Cosette into the convent. These two dark-skinned Black women are allowed a free pass on the colour-chart because they are in helpful, servant roles without personal goals or narrative arcs. Toussaint fits neatly into the well-established role of a Black woman who exists to (happily) serve her white masters, and Sister Simplice, while enjoying a slightly larger role, belongs to a similar tradition in which she sacrifices her own personal and career safety for no other reason than because the white protagonist requires it of her. Both women fit into the nineteenth-century Romantic concept of *le bon nègre*, the 'good-natured [servant], devoted to his master at the expense of his own self, and without bitterness about his servile state' (Prasad 17). As Yee states in her analysis of trends in nineteenth-century French fiction, we are given 'little, or none' of the perspective or individual story of 'the shadowy figure of the maidservant, and more specifically the black maid. [...] but her presence itself is far from neutral' (Yee 2016, 144). It may be argued that this casting does, to a certain extent, 'unsilence' the work of Black women in the nineteenth century, and this is also not to argue that Black women did not historically nor currently find employment as housemaids or as nurses. However, as the only two dark-skinned Black women in the show, the BBC have chosen to continue the conception that these are the only roles Black women may hold in society and on television despite the allegedly 'colour blind' casting. It is telling

that it is the BBC, not Hugo, who incorporates a racial stereotype of Black servitude into their production of *LM;* the show does not complicate our conceptions of nineteenth-century stereotypes, only exaggerates and continues them.

Should we be in any doubt of how the BBC's production is not 'colour blind', we might look at a stark pattern: no Black person survives *BBCMis*. The sheer weighting of lingering shots we get of the named Black people who die in Davies' final episode (Courfeyrac, Daniel, Éponine, Gavroche, Javert) so as to guarantee the peace of Valjean, Marius and Cosette is unbalanced with the white (Enjolras and Graintaire). The only surviving person of colour to get a concluding scene is Thénardier who, as previously mentioned, goes on to become a slave trader. When the internal race chart of the casting directors and creative team is not addressed (let alone acknowledged as existing), the chart becomes systematic, and it is easy for institutions to paint over their productions' inequalities under the guise of equality. Further, by attempting to use non-specific racial identities for their characters as visual short-hands for difference to fill the gaps left by Hugo's Romantic use of fate, *BBCMis* does not spend time adequately dissecting how these broad categories contain multitudes of identities and lived experiences. *BBCMis* argues that being non-white and queer are inherently negative traits, and the production reduces every trait outside of white, cisgender, straight and male to an abnormality that must be fetishized or eradicated. While many vocal Twitter users decried the BBC's bowing to ethnic-pandering quotas, I have argued how the BBC's absolute determination to 'impartial' centrism has in fact upheld the same systems of inequalities that these quotas were intended to dismantle.

PART THREE: LES MIS IN JAPAN

While we might assume that Japan would have the least distinct levels of Hutcheon-described *knowing*, being geographically far from what we deem to be the most iconic versions of *LM* (the French novel, the West End musical and the 2012 Hollywood film), Japan has a more heterocosmic approach to the *LM* universe in which narrative, characterisation, theme and cultural capital are spread across multiple adaptations with an equality (and thus pervasiveness) to an extent unseen in Western countries. There have been at least fourteen original Japanese adaptations of *LM* without including the dubbed releases of British, US American and French productions in Japan, and the Japanese-language cast productions of the stage musical. While this probably does not compare to *LM*'s ubiquity in France, references to Hugo's novel are more widely understood in Japan than in the UK because of the approach to adaptation used since the Meiji era (Stephens 2020, 97), in which references are constant rather than thorough. This heterocosmic approach circulates *LM* in Japanese cultural memory in a way incomparable to the occasional large, reverential production seen in the UK. As such, Hugo's novel becomes part of Japan's 'cultural vocabulary' similar to its status in the USA (Grossman 2016, 117). In order to explore this phenomenon, I take as a short case study two recent media products that take this approach: the 2020 anime based on a light novel 宝石商リチャード氏の謎鑑定 [*The Case Files of Jeweller Richard*] and the game *Persona 5: Strikers.*

In the penultimate episode of *Jeweller Richard*, the eponymous hero is revealed to have adopted his moral code in his detective work because of his childhood love of Valjean; a reference that has, until this point, not been made throughout the anime. In a flashback to his childhood, Richard asks his tutor Chieko: 'Why do these things keep happening to Jean

Valjean?', to which she replies: 'No one who feels sorry for Jean Valjean before his encounter with the Bishop is a bad person.' The 'things' that happen to Valjean (his childhood in Faverolles, his nineteen years in prison and his lost family) are not expanded upon in the musical, and to understand this reference would require at least some further reading, whether in the novel or in an online summary. While the musical maintains that Valjean 'Took the silver, took [his] flight', without spending much time debating the difference between stolen/gifted, at the conclusion of the *Jeweller Richard* episode Chieko is told: 'Just as Jean Valjean didn't steal anything, this [necklace] was a gift to you', which places a fairly authoritative opinion of Valjean's background on the audience, implying that the writers of the anime or the light novel it was based off (Mariko Kunisawa and Nanako Tsujimura respectively) do, at least, have a fairly substantial knowledge of the Hugo novel. Later, as Chieko apologises for her past selfishness, Richard quotes: 「ジャベール、僕は君を責めない。君は君の勤めを果たしただけだ。」 [*"Javert, I don't blame you. You just did your job"*]. The subtitle provided chooses the more embellished translation: "Javert, there's nothing that I blame you for, you did your duty nothing more" (Figure 36). Chieko wrongly attributes this quote to the novel when it is in fact a lyric from the English-language musical ("First Attack"). The official equivalent lyric in Japanese is 「君の職務だろ 恨みなどないぞ」 [*"It's your job, I hold no grudges"*] ("最初の攻撃" [*The First Attack*]), and the Valjean of *LM* stays mostly silent through the same exchange, only saying to Javert: "You are free" [V,1,xix,1010]. The script editors or producers may have chosen to co-opt the language of the lyrics in order to make the reference recognisable not just to those who *know* the *LM* novel but also those who know more about *LM* through cultural memory of the more-prolific Hollywood and stage musical, providing a heterocosmic approach to the novel in their references.

Figure 246 A shot from Jeweller Richard. An animated white man with blond hair and blue eyes smiles sadly. A subtitle reads, in quotes, "Javert, there's nothing that I blame you for."

Figure 257 A shot from Persona: Strikers. Two beings stand next to one another. In the foreground a man dressed in an all-black outfit. In the background a large being glowing in blue light. The being wears a uniform and several metal accessories that evoke a portcullis or a prison.

In the 2020 role-playing video game *Persona 5 Strikers* written by Takaaki Ogata, Toru Yorogi and Yusuke Nitta, a playable character called Zenkichi Hasegawa is a police inspector with a ghost-like 'Persona' (an alter-ego) called Valjean (hereafter referred to as Persona!jean) (Figure 37). Persona!jean is a towering figure in a soldier's uniform, its open jacket and wide lapels reminiscent of the national guard uniform Valjean wears in the stage musical. Persona!jean's armour is a mix between a medieval knight's and a prison cage, with bars forming a crown and a thigh holster reminiscent of a portcullis: half preventing damage and half imprisoning himself. His cage is padlocked, chains emerge from his covered fists and legs, and across his chest is etched the number '24601'. While the number 24601 is given to Valjean in the novel, it is only one such prison identifier (he is also Prisoner 9430), and its prominence as being inseparable from the name Valjean comes from the musical's

consistent references to it. It is also not the number used in the Japanese translation of the musical where Valjean is referred to as 24653 [ni-yon-roku-go-san], since 24601 [ni-yon-roku-zero-ichi] does not rhyme with Valjean, nor does it have the right syllable count. Though the game is Japanese, the design team would be aware that the game would be exported to international markets without changes to the character design, and so likely opted to use the more universal number over the Japan-exclusive version.

This musical-adjacent imagery of Persona!jean is used in conjunction with a closeness of Hasegawa to the novel's Javert. The surname Hasegawa [長谷川] has a meaning equivalent to 'long river', likely referencing Javert's final action of jumping into the Seine. His forename Zenkichi 善吉, 'good luck', is an ironic one, considering Javert's lack of providence throughout his decades-long search for Valjean. When choosing his nickname Hasegawa states: "Call me 'Wolf'. I'm not a dog anymore. I want to become a wolf that can eat even one member of evil" (Tatsuya "Persona 5 Scramble"). Hasegawa takes the name Wolf (specifically using the English loanword ウルフ[urufu] and not the Japanese word 狼 [ōkami]) because there is a difference in lore between the Japanese ōkami (a spirit which serves as protectors of travellers) and the western, predatory fairy tale wolf. As Wolf he is vengeful, motivated to consume the evildoers who made him act as their dog, devolving into his pre-domesticated form. Javert is referred to as being wolf-like throughout the Hugo novel, being described as a cannibalistic wolf pup (I,5,v,143), a wolf 'catching its prey again' (V,4,i,1080), and having 'claws' and 'huge hairy hands' (III,8,xxi,669). This comparison is not one that is made in the musical. The shared wolf imagery suggests that the writers of *Persona 5: Strikers* had a heterocosmic understanding of the *LM* canon, where both elements of the musical and the novel hold equal legible weight as 'source' texts.

The writers for both *Jeweller Richard* and *Persona 5 Strikers* have made intertextual references that imply they are writing for an audience that can at least recognise the musical (likely through the proliferation of the 2012 film), if not also contextualise these references within an understanding of the novel. As Stephens says of a similar use in the 2012 *Amazing Spider-Man* film, the presence of *LM* in half-references and refrains 'stresses the popular reach of [*LM*] and at the same time emphasizes the lure of appropriating and retelling works of fiction' (Stephens 2016a, 193). By continuously and irreverentially breaking and then re-joining *LM* adaptations into a single heterocosm, a Japanese audience has a wider and less novel-focused cultural understanding, which creates a different ground for new adaptations to stand on than the British and French ones analysed in parts one and two of this chapter.

FAN-NOT-FAN

The 2019 Japanese drama レ・ミゼラブル 終わりなき旅路 (hereafter referred to as *Owarinkai)* loosely follows Hugo's *LM*, abridging the Thénardier and Amis plotlines in order to focus on the relationship between Baba Jun (Jean Valjean) and Saito Ryousuke (Javert). Despite the show having major divergences from Hugo's text, by stripping the story of its canonical context so that audiences can focus on message and emotion, screenwriter Hideya Hamada and director Michiko Namiki have created an adaptation that is faithful to the message of Hugo's preface to the novel; taking what Hugo deemed to be universal concerns and proving that nineteenth-century French issues remain relevant to contemporary Japan. Hamada claims that his method for writing this adaption was to think about what he had retained from reading *LM* as a High School student, particularly what

'touched [his] heart', wanting to 'keep a distance' from the novel and the musical while writing the script (Appendix 3). Despite this claim, among the changes that Hamada and Namiki have made to *LM* in creating *Owarinaki* for a contemporary Japanese audience is the inclusion of moments of direct adaptation from the musical. A music box version of "Do You Hear the People Sing" plays underneath Jun and Usui's (Marius) conversation on the hospital roof,[18] and among lines taken from the musical is Tanube's (Thénardier's)「人生て面白い」["Isn't life funny"], the equivalent lyric to the musical Thénardier's 'Isn't the world a remarkable place' in the song "Dog Eats Dog".

For Hamada, someone who self-attests not to be a fan (Appendix 3), the merging of Hugo, Hooper and Boublil and Schönberg canons as one indiscriminate heterocosm of *LM* lore is perhaps inevitable. As a non-fan creating the show for a heterocosm-understanding Japanese audience, Hamada has a degree of flexibility not afforded to most Western adaptors. Instead of a generalist adaption intended to please an audience with a more singular *LM* knowledge-base (be that the novel, the musical, or another adaptation), Hamada does not have to do any source text 'justice', knowing that his work is not intended to be a seminal work as Andrew Davies' BBC show and Tom Hooper's film adaptations were intended to be. Without this pressure to be 'accurate' or 'faithful', Hamada's plot changes swing closer to the idea of fanfiction, where there is an element of wish-fulfilment to the treatment of canon:

What was your motive for writing this drama with a 'happy ending'?

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[18] There is no reference in the credits of the film or on its official website to Boublil and Shönberg, or to Cameron Macintosh (the producer with the English Language rights).

A "Happy Ending" wasn't a conscious choice. I realized that the future life of the

characters will continue. What can we see beyond that? I wanted to make it "hope"

(Appendix 3).

In spite of not being a 'fan' of the work, by rooting his show in what comes 'beyond' Hugo's

text, Hamada engages in fan behaviour: moving beyond the limits of adhering to canon in

order to provide an ending that suits the story he is wanting to tell. Rather than a fidelity-

conscious adaptor with an extreme desire to remain faithful like Davies, Hamada embodies

the fic-writing fan who, through the use of Alternate Universes (AUs) and non-canonical

deviations fill perceived gaps with their own narrative in an effort to bring the story closer to

their own ideals. This desire, it should be noted, is often not intended to replace the

canonical ending but to exist alongside it, forming part of the heterocosm of potentiality.

Hamada chooses to follow this method of adaption, using the novel as a value system rather

than as a backbone, prioritising faithfulness to message over faithfulness to *LM* 'canon', and

to do so he makes significant changes to who and what become metaphorical and

allegorical *Misérables*.

HEISEI/REIWA

The greatest shift from Hugo's novel in *Owarinaki* is the replacement of insurrection with an

era change and natural disaster. The de-centring of protest against government as a tenet of

the drama is a reflection of what Hamada believes to be culturally important to a twenty-

first century Japanese audience (Appendix 3). On the first of May 2019, the Japanese

Emperor Akihito abdicated, ending the Heisei era and bringing in the Reiwa. This era change

is echoed across the marketing: one promotional video sets footage of the suffering

characters against a narrator who tells us that these are the lives of 'people who faced cruel reality for 30 years in the Heisei era' and that this drama climaxes in the 'last new year of Heisei' (Fuji TV "Official announcement"). Each transition between time periods in the show has an overlaid title card with the Gregorian calendar year, the *nengo* [Japanese era year] and location ('１９９４年・平成６年・古部' ['1994 – Heisei year 6 – Kobe']); atypical for dramas set in contemporary Japan and usually a device used for period dramas where *nengo* is intrinsic to building the historical context. Hamada chose to tailor his adaptation to the immediate and highly specific cultural event of an era change to heighten a sense of communal relevance. The show was also aired on the 6th of January, making use of the double marker of era change and Gregorian new year. In correspondence with Japanese fans[19] it seems that this creative vision has been translated to audiences, as pointed out by Kio who highlighted how *Owarinaki* was the second show in a new series created by Fuji-TV:

> 「海外の古典的名作を現代の日本を舞台に蘇らせる」ことを第一義にして作られた、このドラマの延長線上に「レミゼ」が浮かんだのだと

> ['"Les Mis" was chosen to be made into this drama as part of a series whose primary intention is to "revive classic foreign masterpieces in contemporary Japan."'][20]

Kio points out that the first drama in the series, an adaptation of Alexandre Dumas' *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo*, sat squarely in the mentality of the Heisei era and that the recently aired third, *Sherlock,* is advertised as a drama that focuses on modern Tokyo in the new

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[19] At their request, the three fans will be referred to by their Twitter names: Akiko (@aokiaki3), Kio (@kiolovestfjok), Matari (@matari_moka). I use gender-neutral language to refer to all three to respect their anonymity.
[20] Personal correspondence with Kio, 24/02/2020

Reiwa era. The deliberate choice of *LM* as the transitory show is not overlooked by the

Japanese audience, who are encouraged as a society to use this transition to *'yarinaoseru'*

[start afresh] at the dawn of a new era, following *LM* characters in clearing away the past to

make room for a new future. Akiko also notes the importance of era to theme:

> In Japan, not many people like politics and religion. specially in entertainment. If
>
> "Owarinaki tabiji" had those elements, some people would think it didn't
>
> appropriate for the beginning of the new era [sic].[21]

I will return to religion below, but first note that Akiko's mention of politics refers less to

governance and more to what many Japanese people believe is a Western import:

insurrection and protest. In a similar way to how Hugo believes he is writing a novel with a

particular political message only to undermine it with his language (as discussed in Chapter

One with the core disconnect between his pro-Abolishment message and his anti-Black

language), the Japanese drama does not address social inequality in as powerful a way as it

believes itself to be doing, likely in part due to this dismissal of 'Western' social justice

movements.

While Japanese people in the diaspora do face racial discrimination and are not part

of the Eurocentric ideal, as we have seen with the rise in anti-Asian hate crimes in 2021

(Campbell; Grierson), the majority-ethnic *wajin* Japanese people in Japan do not experience

racism in Japan, and in fact perpetuate racism against the Indigenous Ainu and Ryukyu

ethnic groups, mixed-race Japanese citizens (especially those who have a Black or Korean

parent), as well as against *gaijin,* ethnic minority immigrants (Illmer, *BBC*). Hideya Hamada is

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[21] Personal correspondence with Akiko, 22/02/2020

a majority ethnic writer in his majority ethnic country. *Owarinaki* is thus not without racial prejudice. The drama's sole ethnic minority actor is credited only as 'DilipT.', rendering him a nameless, unsearchable extra, and the part he is given is that of a small-time, heavily-accented-Japanese speaking, brown-skinned criminal. *Owarinaki* is also uncritical in its portrayal of the Japanese police force which, as Thisanka Siripala reports, has recently come under scrutiny for its low human rights standards and consistent racial profiling (Siripala, *The Diplomat*). Though Japanese people are generally supportive of the Black Lives Matter movement, showing surprise and offence over American police brutality, there is a perception that racism is a foreign concept, not applicable to either the Japanese police or to the general population (Jones, *Tokyo Weekender*). As Shuichi Furuya points out, 'Japan has yet to adopt subparagraphs (a) and (b) under Article 4 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which criminalize the dissemination of ideas based on racial superiority' (qtd. in Siripala), and the overwhelming response Black and mixed-race Japanese people receive to speaking out against racism is the Nationalistic 'if you don't like it, leave' rhetoric (Hida and Rich, *NYT*). In 2020, Kazuma Hashimoto warned protesters on Twitter to label their BLM protests in Japan as 'peaceful marches' because foreigners do not have the right to protest in Japan (@JusticeJazzy_), especially in cases where political activity can be seen to 'have influence on the political decision-making and its implementation in Japan' (Wetherall "McLean v Minister of Justice"). While *Owarinaki* contains no outright, bigoted rhetoric, it is also a film that claims to be speaking for the oppressed. It is far from radical in its depiction of cisgender, straight, *wajin* Japanese people, and by casually including a *gaijin* extra, it both perpetuates stereotypes of immigrant criminality while wilfully ignoring the racism experienced by ethnic minorities in Japan.

Unlike France with its historic culture of revolution through protest, which in contemporary adaptations can be made synonymous with social justice causes like the Yellow Vests or the #BalanceTonPorc movement, Japanese citizens do not have this as a recent precedent and so it cannot be made relevant to a Heisei/Reiwa Japanese setting. Replacing this theme is the more local criticism of Japanese collectivism.

NAMING / SELVES

Figure 38 A tweet from Bernie Sanders. The campaign slogan is "Not me. Us." the caption is "If we are going to defeat Trump and transform our country, it will take all of us." The hero image is Sanders shaking the hands of multiple people of mixed-ethnicities who reach out to him to form a mass of clasped hands.

While in the West the more liberal trend is to criticise over-individualism, with popular socialist leaders like Jeremy Corbyn and Bernie Sanders mobilising their voters with belief systems that revolve around 'community' visions of the future (Figure 38), the Japanese trend has been to gain power from conservatism by *encouraging* individualism. Japanese conservative collectivism decentres a person as an individual and punishes non-conformity, therefore becoming a social justice cause that is considered more local (and thus urgent) than what are perceived as 'foreign' issues like racism. The characters of *Owarinkai* only succeed when they are able to balance their community duty with individualism, the film

criticising both the extremes of absolute selfishness and absolute selflessness. Just as the novel's Valjean believes his safety lies in the complete abstraction of his individual self from his name ('everything he had ever done till that day was nothing but a hole he had been digging in order to bury his name' (I,7,iii,187)), protagonist Baba Jun's re-attempt at conformity after his incarceration begins with the masking of his self through his adopting the names of those who would donate their identities. Jun first takes his deceased brother's name to become Tetsu (Jeanne Valjean), then Watanabe Takumi (Fauchelevent), then Tokuda (Bishop Myriel). In taking these names, both Jun and Valjean believe that they are closer to achieving salvation, and that to reintegrate back into society they must completely destroy their previous selves:

> What [Jean Valjean] had always most dreaded [...] was ever to hear that name spoken; he told himself that this would, for him, be the end of everything; that the day that name reappeared, it would cause his new life to vaporize around him, and, who knows, perhaps inside of him, his new soul? (I,7,iii,187)

Valjean, through the narrator, refuses to even name his past identity in his thoughts, as if in saying the name it might gain power. This process of renaming is pushed further in *Owarinaki* in the indigenizing of Hugo's characters' names into Japanese approximations. Stam uses the analogy of adaptors as scholars consulting ancient books to compare how adaptors mediate and transform source texts; 'indigenizing' names so as to be phonetically similar but with philosophical double meanings. Stam quotes Du You:[22] '[whenever] one consults the books of the ancients, it is because one wishes to reveal new meanings and

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[22] 杜佑, Stam transliterates his name as 'Do You'.

form institutions in accordance with present circumstances.'[23] The audience thus compares the two names even when the source is completely stripped away, enhancing the adaptation's commentary with its changed filter. Japanese names typically have several meanings, one by phonetic sound and one by the choice of *kanji* (logographic character). With several ways to spell each name, each carrying a different meaning, there is a bigger culture in the Japanese fan community of searching out character profiles on official websites to 'know' more about the choices in characterisation achieved through chosen kanji. Baba Jun, Fuwa Yui and Kosue are phonetically similar to their French counterparts: Valjean, Fantine and Cosette, but they carry double meanings accessible by looking up the character chart on the Fuji TV website (Figure 39).

馬場純 [Baba Jun (Valjean)] = Horse | Field | Purity

渡辺拓海 [Watanabe Takumi (Valjean's alias)] = Handing over | Vicinity | Clear (land)| Ocean

不破唯 [Fuwa Yui (Fantine)] = Strange | Breakable | Sole

斎藤涼介 [Saito Ryousuke (Javert)] = Religious Purification | Wisteria | Cool | Concern

Fuwa Yui's surname is phonetically linked to the phrase 不安 [fuan], meaning unease or insecurity, and while 'Yui' is typically used as 唯一 [yuiitsu] meaning 'only', with a more positive meaning similar to 'the one and only', her name serves to further her isolation, alone in the world as a societally non-conforming single-mother disowned by her family. The

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[23] This quote is attributed to one by Michael Cook in *A Brief History of the Human Race* (196–197), which itself is not given a reference to the original or to who translated it.

name 'Ryousuke' is phonetically associated with helpfulness. This might be an expected name for a police officer, but adds a layer of irony in the context of an adaptation of Javert, who prides himself on being lawful more than helpful. In a triple meaning, wisteria in *hanakotoba* [Japanese flower language] has a history of class divide, where purple was associated with nobility. While Ryousuke's family is far from nobility, the Saito's relative financial stability and Ryousuke's father's running of a scam on Jun's mother is one aspect of Jun's mother's suicide and Jun's subsequent incarceration which thus divides them. The wisteria is also a popular motif for spring and new beginnings, the ultimate 'hopeful' character development Hamada gives Ryousuke. The name 'Jun' is typically associated with truthfulness in its phonetic form, and it is important that Hamada has chosen the character 純, meaning 'genuine/pure/innocent' for 'Jun' over the equally used character 準 meaning 'to conform to'. The innocent here has more connotations of child-like purity than procedural or legal status, but still works as a double marker of his sudden loss of childhood through an act of self-defence. Hidden behind double and triple meanings, Jun both rejects the idea that his original identity could be genuine and that his current self can retain a sense of childlike innocence, and thus constructs several layers between himself and the world that perceives him. In being 'handed over' the name Watanabe Takumi, Jun develops into a person who can be seen as vast and beautiful, unobstructed by his past, but to be free he must choose to return to who he is: his original purity. After desperately avoiding being associated with the name 'Baba Jun', his climactic moment of character development is to re-introduce himself to Ryousuke:「馬場純 に戻ります」["I am returning as Baba Jun"]. While indigenising the names of Hugo's characters, Hamada can give his Japanese audience an additional layer of metatext to discover while further distancing Valjean from his 'most dreaded' name.
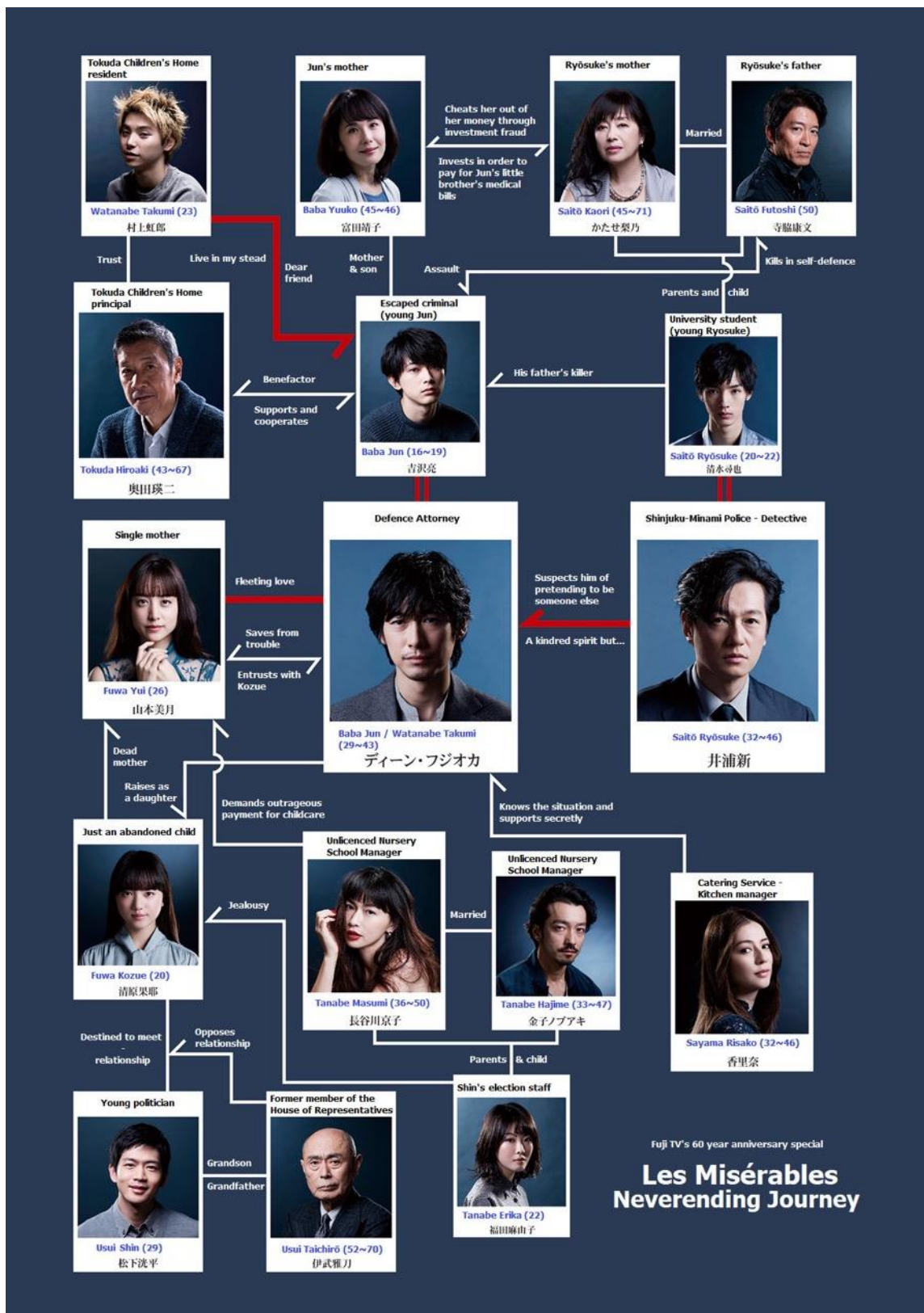
Tokuda Children's Home resident
Watanabe Takumi (23)
村上虹郎

Jun's mother
Baba Yuuko (45~46)
富田靖子

Ryōsuke's mother
Saitō Kaori (45~71)
かたせ梨乃

Ryōsuke's father
Saitō Futoshi (50)
寺脇康文

Cheats her out of her money through investment fraud

Invests in order to pay for Jun's little brother's medical bills

Married

Trust   Live in my stead   Dear friend   Mother & son   Assault   Kills in self-defence

Tokuda Children's Home principal
Tokuda Hiroaki (43~67)
奥田瑛二

Escaped criminal (young Jun)
Baba Jun (16~19)
吉沢亮

University student (young Ryosuke)
Saitō Ryōsuke (20~22)
清水尋也

Benefactor

Supports and cooperates

His father's killer

Parents and child

Single mother
Fuwa Yui (26)
山本美月

Defence Attorney
Baba Jun / Watanabe Takumi (29~43)
ディーン・フジオカ

Shinjuku-Minami Police - Detective
Saitō Ryōsuke (32~46)
井浦新

Fleeting love

Saves from trouble

Entrusts with Kozue

Suspects him of pretending to be someone else

A kindred spirit but...

Knows the situation and supports secretly

Dead mother

Raises as a daughter

Demands outrageous payment for childcare

Just an abandoned child
Fuwa Kozue (20)
清原果耶

Unlicenced Nursery School Manager
Tanabe Masumi (36~50)
長谷川京子

Unlicenced Nursery School Manager
Tanabe Hajime (33~47)
金子ノブアキ

Catering Service - Kitchen manager
Sayama Risako (32~46)
香里奈

Jealousy

Married

Destined to meet - relationship

Opposes relationship

Parents & child

Young politician
Usui Shin (29)
松下洸平

Former member of the House of Representatives
Usui Taichirō (52~70)
伊武雅刀

Shin's election staff
Tanabe Erika (22)
福田麻由子

Grandson   Grandfather

Fuji TV's 60 year anniversary special
Les Misérables Neverending Journey

Figure 3926 The relationship chart for Owarinaki Tabiji – translated from Japanese by tumblr user vapaus-ystavyys-tasaarvo. Character portraits for each of the characters are labelled with information like their names, aliases, and ages. Each character is connected to other people via arrows, their relationship labelled. The untranslated words are the actors' names.

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When these stolen names are not enough of a disguise, Jun begins to code-switch his language use to suit his audience. On first introducing himself to Detective Saito, Jun uses the very formal personal pronoun 私 [watakushi], then while giving consultation to Fuwa Yui he uses the informal and boyish 僕 [boku], lightly emasculating himself even while giving both legal advice and pastoral care: 「僕もいないですよ。た頼る家族。同じですよ。」 ["I don't have them either, reliable family. I'm the same as you"]. It is not unusual to shift what formality one uses to refer to one's self depending on audience, but the extremity of 私 [watakushi] used instead of the more common 私 [watashi] juxtaposed against the intentionally young-sounding 僕 [boku] instead of 俺 [ore] (which Ryousuke uses for himself to intentionally convey his masculinity), creates a significant separation between Jun's personas. By communicating with his audience in a language that they can understand, Jun prioritises their comfort over his own identity. This ability seems to have been inherited from Hugo's Bishop Myriel: 'Speaking all tongues, he entered all hearts and minds' (I,1,iv,13) and, while it is praised by both Hugo and the drama as a true performance of kindness, Jun's overperformance of self is criticised as extreme. In the drama's equivalent of Valjean discovering Fantine's having begun sex work to pay her debts, Yui follows Jun's impassioned speech about helping her 「やり直す」 ["start again"] with a cold and dismissive 「ただの依頼人なのに？」 ["when I'm just your client?"]. Jun cannot refute her and is not able to meet her eye. She accepts her win with a crushed nod and is pushed further into isolation. While the adaption of language is seen to be kindness, the extreme of Jun's is exposed as too much of a conscious performance, leaving Yui unable to trust the integrity behind his words. Yui then adapts her own words to the corporate language Jun

had been avoiding, purposefully becoming a 'client' rather than the friend Jun has been posing as. In doing so, Yui dispels the thin veneer of familiarity and realigns the power dynamic from familial equals to client and service provider. By not allowing enough of his own self to permeate his actions and by attempting to become an idea of *community kindness* rather than an individual, Jun realises that he cannot truly help anyone and is forced to either embody corporate hyper-collectivism or revert to the instability of individual personhood.

For both Ryousuke and Jun, repression of individuality in order to conform to society's value judgements is of primary importance. Ryousuke's characterisation plays heavily off the very little family history we get from Hugo about Javert. While Ryousuke's parents appear to run a laundromat, his father runs a scam on the neighbourhood, pretending to invest people's savings in stocks but pocketing them instead. Unlike his *criminal* parents, who he judges by action and not by reason, Ryousuke conforms to the laws of society by becoming the law itself, and by catching anyone he deems to be stepping out of line. Rather than exist as a flawed individual as his parents do, Ryousuke/Javert prefers the lack of personhood that comes from existing as a *self*-less role within an institution like the police. This fight over individuality and public role are inherited from Valjean and Javert, especially through the Montreuil-Sur-Mer part of their lives, where they exist as the Mayor and the Police; conduits of Hugo's criticisms of government and law enforcement (I,5,v,144; I,6,ii,171; 177; I,8,iii,243). When Hugo removes Valjean and Javert's careers from their identity, their actions are no longer commentaries over their professions but criticisms of them as people. As such, Valjean only truly becomes human when he admits to himself that he is acting in his own self-interest, eventually prioritising Cosette's

safety (and thus his own happiness) over being *generally* good under the guise of Mayor (I,7,iii,188-90). This much more personal attempt at a moral code allows Valjean to balance his being kind for kindness' sake, keeping a 'good deed' from simply being a thoughtless (and thus neglectful) action, even when (or perhaps especially when) that morality can look like selfishness (IV,3,vii,740). Valjean ultimately 'succeeds where [Javert] fails in reconciling all his potentially conflicting selves', demonstrating that his various selves can come together to 'become part of a richer, more totalizing identity' (Grossman and Stephens 2017, 392; 390). Javert can never reconcile this balance, and so must die. As I will explore further later, in diverting from canon and allowing Ryousuke to live, Hamada allows Ryousuke/Javert to realise for himself what Baba Jun/ Jean Valjean has: that it is only when choosing to help himself and to grow as an individual that he can truly help others.

This individual/communal dynamic plays out again and again throughout the drama, especially in the cat and mouse dialogue between Ryousuke and Jun. Both men suppress the regional accents of their youth. Having grown up in Kobe, as teenagers they both speak in *Kansai-ben* [Kansai-dialect], an urban accent that is typically associated in Japanese media with being villainous ("Kansai Regional Accent", *TV Tropes*) or uneducated ("Idiot from Osaka", *TV Tropes*).[24] As Tokyo-living adults, both men have adopted the RP-equivalent of Japanese as is usual practise for people in what are considered esteemed professions, until Jun slips, slightly, into Kansai-ben over drinks. While Ryousuke is visibly intrigued to find a fellow from Kansai and subsequently warms to the idea of camaraderie Jun has been attempting, Jun's willingness to deviate from the norm, even in as innocuous a form as his

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[24] For reference, the trend of dubbing the Kansai accent for American audiences in anime is to give the character a Texan / Southern accent.

home dialect, is also a powerful enough red flag to Ryousuke for his suspicions to build. In

revealing one small truth about his self, Jun's true identity begins to be unravelled. While

talking about how Jun believes that one of his adopted 'delinquents' should find a way to

work out what to do next without Jun's help (advice given to him by Tokuda in his youth),

the pair meta-analyse one-another's personalities:

涼介 . 偽善だな

馬 . え、偽善です

涼介 . 他人を救うことで自分が救われか？それ人種いるだな

馬 . 多くの被害者を救うことで救われとか

涼介 . 人助けしたいわけじゃない。ただ…犯罪を犯す奴は許さらないだけ。

馬 . でも結果多くの人を救っている

[RYOUSUKE. How hypocritical.

JUN. Yes, it is hypocritical.

RYOUSUKE. By saving everyone around you, you can save yourself? I suppose there

are races of people like that.

JUN. By saving a lot of victims, you can save yourself?

RYOUSUKE. I don't want to save people. I just... I will not forgive criminals.

JUN. But at the end of the day, you end up saving a lot of people anyway.]

While on one level this dialogue appears like friends commentating on one another's flaws,

this meta-analysis also reveals that they are aware that they are both playing characters.

Instead of seeing one another as people, they both understand the world in terms of a

formula: in saving x amount of people or in catching y number of criminals, they will have succeeded at being the Lawyer or the Police Officer they play. Despite analysing one another and concluding that they are the same, and despite acknowledging that they are hypocrites for acting the role of policeman/lawyer rather than existing as a human, they both refuse to shift the mentality around their own behaviour, preferring the comfort of the anonymity the job title brings. Jun's secretary Risako, who has watched the pair hypocritically criticise one another, laughs at Ryousuke's use of the phrase 「人種」 [race of people], as if he is distancing himself by making a physical, genetic division between their Played Roles. Risako purposefully invalidates Ryousuke's attempt to further alienate himself from Jun with 「なんか…二人似てる気がするな」 ["there's something… You two are very similar, aren't you"]. While race is not necessarily in focus here, the cultural necessity of 'fitting in' is, and Hamada uses this epidemic of enforced hegemony as his equivocal political topic in this adaptation. It is only when the characters of *Owarinaki* are able to balance their individuality with their communal duty that they are able to achieve both personhood and, thus, happiness. In disguising accents, names, personalities and thus individuality, Jun and Ryousuke attempt to repress their vulnerabilities, but can only progress as healthy and functioning members of Japanese society once they have recognised the importance of themselves as more than blank cogs in the collective machine.

QUEER/OTHER

In his roundup of the TV shows airing in Spring 2019, critic Takashi Kimura summarises the trends he sees across the first season of the Reiwa era: 1) Facing the new era with an enlightened personality and 2) the largest 'LGBT ブーム' [boom] in drama history with a quarter of spring shows featuring queer protagonists.

いずれも描かれているのは、困難を抱え、問題に直面した主人公が、「それでも自分らしく生きよう」と奮闘する姿。まるで令和という新時代の道しるべを示しているようであり、制作サイドが視聴者の共感を得るために模索していることの証だろう。

[In both instances, a protagonist who faces difficulties becomes a figure who decides: "even so, I will live in a way that is true to myself". It is almost as if, in this new Reiwa era, production companies are looking to gain audience sympathy] (Kimura).

By referencing the Heiwa/Reiwa transition, Kimura places the feelings of a changing landscape on the specific shoulders of the change in era, holding it accountable as the cornerstone for change, compounding the almost magical properties the new year can have on living one's life. Kimura's use of the phrase 「自分らしく生きよう」 is difficult to translate, equivalent perhaps to the flippant 'you do you',[25] less a decision to 'live as I truly am' but as Akiko explains, the start of a *process* to get to 'who I really am'. This process includes coming to terms with all parts of one's life 'not only the good but also the bad- and accept them'.[26] Kimura goes on to clarify that he believes these twin trends have risen out of the global shift towards 「多様性を尊重しよう」 ["let's respect diversity"], the programming going some way to address public hate-crimes (though his language suggests that he believes 'diversity' to be a global import to Japan). He states that dramas with sympathetic non-normative protagonists have previously been difficult to create due to

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[25] Urban Dictionary user personthingything defines 'you do you' as "the act of doing what one believes is the right decision, being oneself".
[26] Personal correspondence with Akiko, 28/02/2020

criticisms over the use of laugh-at-not-with comedy,[27] but that the shows this season have made successful attempts, even outside of the explicitly queer sub-genres they are typically relegated to. Kimura mentions a Boys Love (BL)[28] drama at the beginning of his review but does not refer to any of the Spring dramas with queer characters as being BL: a huge shift in mentality from where previously queerness had been othered to its own genre. In these spring dramas, queer characters are instead integrated into the larger 'drama' genre and are thus welcomed as societally 'normal'. While respectable assimilation is not the goal of queer people, the shift in language is still notable.

While there is no explicitly queer protagonist in *Owarinaki,* it is a 震災後 映画 [*shinsaigo eiga;* after the earthquake film], a genre of films made post the 2011 Tohoku earthquake, studied similarly to the 'post-9/11' genre in US American culture. Yutaka Kubo argues that *shinsaigo* films use the undercurrent of same-sex desire, particularly in male-male relationships, to deconstruct the harm done to Japanese society in not allowing men to openly mourn for other men lest they be perceived as gay (55). The vilification of male intimacy in public has the double effect of propagating the idea to straight men that showing emotion is intrinsically gay and thus bad, and telling queer men that it is bad to be out as visibly gay. Ryousuke's anger is frustration at a chaotic, quake-filled world: on a personal level he cannot choose who his family are and he feels guilt at both standing by their side and distancing himself from them. He also exists in a world where his chances for revenge are snatched from him by natural disaster: Baba Jun manages to escape Ryousuke

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[27] Likely referencing criticisms over the use of effeminate gay men and trans women as punchlines, both identities typically falling under the bracket of the colloquial term (and popular character trope) 'オカマ' ['okama'; similar to the use of 'tranny'].
[28] A genre of Japanese drama, typically created by women for a female market, often featuring romanticised male/male relationships.

in the ruins of two separate earthquakes, the 1995 Great Hanshin and the 2011 Tohoku. Ryousuke struggles to transfer the ideals he has only just begun to control in his microcosms of family and work via his conformity, which motivates him to vent this frustration on what superficially connects every chaotic event in his life: Baba Jun. By overpowering Jun and making the man bend to his will, Ryousuke believes that he will be able to make the unruly (Romantic providence) yield and thus fix every other broken element of his life. This distillation of the effects of frustration and powerlessness because of his survivor's remorse is worsened by his cultural inability to express his emotions for fear of being read as queer and thus further ostracising himself from society. Jun is also not allowed to publicly mourn for his friend Takumi despite the profound loss he feels for the death of his best friend. In contrast to his desperately pleading with a prison guard and wandering the streets in open despair over the death of his mother and brother, Jun must internalise the non-familial Takumi's death, neutralising any outward show of emotion for the other young man lest his identity be outed. Raised in this society, Jun and Ryousuke are unable to express the depths of their emotions for one another, despite being in similar circumstances. Jun recognises in Ryousuke a similarly broken and disguised man and so reaches out to craft a bond over drinks, but the necessity of *shinsaigo*-era neutrality prevents them from outing themselves and the intensity of their emotions at the risk being perceived as queer; a further unnecessary othering of their selves from the safety that comes in conformity.

Jun and Ryousuke, by virtue of being adaptations of Valjean and Javert, are queer characters in that they are portrayed as asexual and aromantic, canonically uninterested in the pursuit of sexual and romantic relationships (as I will go on to analyse in Chapter Four). Neither Jun nor Ryousuke show romantic or sexual interest in any other character of the

show, and the closest either come to outbursts of emotion is at one another. Jun and Ryousuke's relationship develops like a romantic drama: fated to know one another as teenagers, reuniting as adults under meet-cute circumstances, reluctantly bonding as friends, Jun giving Ryousuke a piggy-back to safety after he's been kidnapped, Ryousuke running to Jun's hospital bed for final words before a surgery, their coming together at the conclusion to acknowledge their belonging together. This devotion to one another stands in place of a romantic plot, and it is arguable that had this fated relationship been given to a male/female pair of characters, it would carry a more explicitly romantic overtone (as in the telenovela *Los Miserables*). As it stands, they have not been presented as gay men with romantic or sexual feelings for one another, but they do remain queer in their casually aromantic identities.

As will be discussed further later, Valjean is also often gender non-conforming, with a non-traditional relationship with both masculinity and with motherhood. One line included in *Owarinaki* taken from the 2012 film is Valjean's response to young Cosette's asking "Will you be like a papa to me?" "Yes Cosette. This is true. I'll be a father and mother to you." This is a new addition not found in the stage musical. In *Owarinaki* the sentiment is transposed to 「おじさんがお父さん？」「お父さんでお母さん。」 ["Are you my father, mister?" "Your father and your mother"]. This is a condensation of the original sentiment, that Valjean 'had never been a father, lover, husband, friend. [...] He went over to the bed where [Cosette] was sleeping and trembled with joy; he felt the pangs of a mother and he did not know what they were' (II,4,iii,363). He is described as both Cosette's mother and father, to the point where Cosette assumes her birth mother's soul passed from Fantine into Valjean (IV,3,iv,732). The moment of the mantle of motherhood being passed is

visualised in *Owarinaki* when Fuwa Yui's last words are played over a shot of Baba Jun in his and Kosue's home as he looks at Kosue's childhood bookbag. The bookbag is a culturally important handmade, quilted bag that mothers make and personalise for their children when they start school, the pink and yellow bag (the colours of Jun's home) embroidered with Kosue's name (Figure 40, 41). Here, Jun is not wearing the suits of his lawyer days but soft and textured home clothes, his hair fluffier and less neatly partitioned. That this idea of Jun/Valjean as not-a-mother and not-a-father but a genderless parent has maintained power from the original text through to the Hollywood and Japanese adaptations tells us that there remains a cross-cultural fascination with the performance of gender roles, especially in a character that is coded with features assigned to both masculinity and femininity.

Figures 40, 41 Two shots from Owarinaki Tabiji. In the first, a pink cloth bag hangs from a bookcase. It is labelled "Kosue" in katagana. In the second, Baba Jun, in a soft-pink room, looks towards the bag with a sad expression.

This raises the question of what can be considered 'canonical' or 'faithful' in an adaptation: Baba Jun becomes an apple-farming lawyer in *Owarinaki*, which is certainly not *LM* canon. His parental genderfluidity is, however, closer in characterisation than *BBCMis*' Valjean who is hyper-masculine to the point of violence while retaining his canonical identity as factory-owning Mayor. While *Owarinaji* would not be considered a 'queer' drama, its queerness comes from Jun's deliberate choice to other himself to society, rejecting conformity to the binary parent model, and from Ryousuke and Jun's asexual,

aromantic relationship with one another. Hamada uses the *shinsaigo* genre to address the harm done to Japanese society by asking men to silence their emotions. Only once the pair, whose relationship is defined by their proximity to earthquake-related grief, can openly acknowledge the extent of their emotions in public at the conclusion of the film can they end their repressed states, growing as both individuals *and* re-join the collective.

EVERYBODY LIVES AU

Fan Akiko mentioned how 'religion', (specifically meaning Hugo's focus on Christianity), is perceived as being an inappropriate theme at a peak moment of uniquely Japanese history. Valjean's devotion to his faith could not have been code-switched by replacing the institutional, organised religion that the monotheistic Catholicism is to France with the Japanese Shinto/Buddhist belief system because they are not analogous in poignancy or in practise and would thus lose nuance. There is no real Shinto equivalent, for example, to a Bishop who might buy Valjean's soul for a singular God, but it would also be inappropriate for Baba Jun to convert to Christianity in *Owarinaki* when the changing of the era is a Shinto event: to receive good blessings in the new era, you would visit a Shinto shrine to pray. The major theme of Christian faith is used by Hugo as a mode to communicate what, in the ideal world, would be shared human values, if only faith could be separated from the corruption that is human institutions: 'We have a duty: to work on the human soul […] to clean up faith, to remove superstition from on top of religion; to rid God of worms' (II,7,v,428). In *Owarinaki*, Hugo's focus on Christianity is replaced with a more locally universal theme: the impact of and national sense of loss caused by the 2011 earthquake, which, unlike Shintoism, can become the vessel for conversations about national institutions,

infrastructure and the human soul. Within *shinsaigo eiga* there is a particular kind of desperation and helplessness that comes from being the victim of something that cannot be fought against; a parallel to Valjean's anger at and early denunciation of God's providence:

> [Valjean] felt vaguely that something monstrous was sitting on his back. [...] laws, prejudices, deeds, men, things — [were] coming and going above him, according to the complex and mysterious movement God imparts to civilization, walking on top of him and crushing him with an unspeakably calm cruelty and remorseless indifference (I,2,vii,79).

Valjean's childhood, incarceration and subsequent treatment by society are a string of circumstances that cause helplessness until he is left wrought: 'Rage can be wild and unfounded; you can be wrongfully stirred up. But you only feel outraged when you are fundamentally right to do so somewhere along the line. Jean Valjean felt outraged' (I,2,vii,76). Without a Christian God to feel outraged against (and then to reconcile with), *Owarinaki* uses the omnipotent violence of the earthquake and the omnipresence of disease/death to establish a sense of helplessness in the face of predestination.

Owarinaki becomes an 'everybody lives AU': a fanfiction term in which authors create an Alternate Universe (AU) in which no canonical death happens. These AUs typically imagine how characters would have lived after the canon plot should their deaths not had happened. Ryousuke does not complete a Javert-esque suicide, Baba Jun does not die of sadness like Valjean, Erika does not take a gun wound for Usui as Éponine does for Marius. Hamada challenges Hugo by emphasising that there is more courage in living on despite harsh circumstances, allowing a glimpse of success. As fan Kio stated in their overview of the drama on Twitter:

みんなが生きて、みんなが行き着くべき場所にたどり着いて、そこから〈やり直す〉。[…] 生きる意味はある!そこに命としてある限り。

[Everyone lives, everyone gets to where they need to go, and from there they are able to "start again". […] There is still a reason to live on! As long as you have a reason to live.] (@kiolovestfjok)

Fuji-TV producer Ōta Masaru chose to add the subtitle 'Owarinaki Tabiji' ['never-ending journey'] (Appendix 3), which is a set-up for an audience to anticipate despair. Even for a viewer of the show with less knowledge of *LM* lore,[29] it is hard not to know that *LM* does not end happily given general cultural osmosis. However, the 'everybody lives AU', concluding with Jun and Ryousuke riding off into the sunset together (Figure 42), the typical trope for new starts ("Riding into the Sunset", *TV Tropes*), feels like a deliberate attempt to destabilise the current trend of hopelessness when looking towards the future. As Grossman argues, Hugo 'solidly links the notions of republic, revolution, resurrection, and transcendence […] often through the image of sunrise' (Grossman 1994, 249). By building audience expectation of a tragic ending, the pay-off of characters achieving satisfying personal development while allowing further room for off-screen growth in their adaptation-given resurrection encourages an audience, no matter how hopeless, to finish the show with some hope that they too can start the Reiwa era by starting afresh themselves and achieve transcendence. The *Owarinaki Tabiji,* the never-ending journey, is not the musical's "nothing changes" ("Turning"), but a statement that everything should change to create progress. The film's use of the Everybody Lives AU in the form of 「自分らしく生きよう」 ['let me live as

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[29] Japanese reviewer SNATCH begins his analysis of the BBC show with a brief introduction of Hugo's work but prefaces it with a 「だいたいを皆さん知ってますよね」 [I'm sure you all know, but…]

myself'] is deeply rooted in both the film's position as both a *shinsaigo eiga* and as a

Heiwa/Reiwa film, where Hamada is aware that his audience requires a storyline that

transcends the seeming endlessness of grief, setting up the new era as a decisive turning

point for real change.

Figure 4227 A shot from Owarinaki Tabiji. A car drives along a road on the coast of the sea, the sun setting on the horizon. The road is lined with telephone poles.

CONCLUSION

Much of the popularity of *Owarinaki* comes from the star-power of popular lead actor Dean

Fujioka, the Japanese actor-musician who plays Baba Jun. The majority of the most vocal

Twitter fans of the show are self-attesting Fujioka fans, their twitter profiles sporting edits

of Fujioka's face as their avatars and twitter banners. In a review of the show Kio writes:

> そしてディーンさん。[…] 追われる者隠れる者の、表に出さない出せない感情が目の色にだけ浮かぶ無表情。あの震災の日からは心底笑ったことなどなかったかと思わせる憂いを含んだ控えめな笑顔。

> [And then Dean. […] in the glint of the colour of his eyes could portray the emotions of what it is like to live while chased and hidden, the true character hidden behind

the surface. His sorrowful, modest smile made me wonder whether he had laughed from his heart since the day of the earthquake.] (@kiolovestfjok)

Kio's language is aimed at their Twitter-audience: thoughtful analysis in poetic language is prefaced with 'でも。でもね' ['But. But, right'], moving away from semi-formal prose for moments of colloquialism. Kio's bias towards Fujioka adds to the character of Baba Jun; where passion for and love of the actor expands to incorporate the character they play. Jun is written as a handsome protagonist with a sympathetic background, but this personality is compounded with the casting of a charismatic and popular actor, known for having a clean and romantic image. In comparison, the BBC's casting of Dominic West, most known for rugged and often violent roles played a similar role to the casting of Hugh Jackman in the 2012 film, who having recently starred as Wolverine in the X-Men franchise focused on the hypermasculine nature of Valjean's physical prowess. As a drama that specifically caters to Dean Fujioka's fanbase, we see a much more domestic and effeminate adaptation of Valjean in *Owarinaki*.

In response to my asking 'What do you think the message of *Owarinaki Tabiji* / *Les Mis* is? Do you think the message is the same or different from the original?', Kio, Matari and Akiko gave the following responses:

Kio: メッセージはどちらも同じ、「生きろ」。どんな状況に置かれても精一杯生ききることが命の意味なのだ、ということかと受け取っています。ただ、ドラマでは舞台を「現代の日本」に置き換えているため、原作とは「生ききる」ことの在りようを違う形で表すことになったのだろうと思います。

[The message is the same: 'live on'. The message that I have taken from the show is

that the meaning of life is to live to the best of your ability no matter your circumstances. However, because the drama was set in contemporary Japan, I think that the ways we show what 'living' is are different.]

Matari: 時代が変わっても、人はつまずき、思いは同じだから！罪を背負うとは？償う事とは？それは誰にも事情が違ってもあると思う大事な事は逃げずにそれを受け止めて生きる‼

[I think that it's the same, that even if eras change, people stumble! What is a sin? What is atonement? We should live by taking into account that everyone comes from different circumstances, and that we should not run away from important things!!]

Akiko: I think Les Mis is the story about those who have accepted God's love -agape- and those who have not. And it resembles the composition of Jesus Christ and Jewish religious leaders in the first century C.E. Christian elements is indispensable for Les Mis, but [Japan]'s drama doesn't have it. I think it's the biggest difference. [...] "Owarinaki tabiji" is the story that liquidating past which they have turned away from. In that sense, this [drama] values "personality". [...] this drama was just a story where two men who had miserable childhood met and understood each other [sic].

The three come from slightly different cultural contexts: Kio had read a children's adaptation of the novel as a child and had watched the show as a fan of Fujioka. Matari had read an abridged copy in Junior High School and had also watched for Fujioka. Akiko, as a fan of Alfie Boe, had travelled to both the West End and Broadway several times to watch the musical, had the desire to converse in English about the musical, but had not read the

novel. The emphasis that Kio and Matari place on a general message of '状況' and '事情' [both words for 'circumstance'] in comparison with Akiko's focus on Jun's storyline comes from the lack of influence of the musical on their perspectives. As two people who had watched the show without the influence of the musical, Kio and Matari absorbed themes of minority identity and structures of class more keenly than Akiko, whose focus remained on the relationship between Ryousuke and Jun, the recognisable remnants of the musical. As a fan of Alfie Boe's performances as Valjean, Akiko's attention to *Owarinaki's* equivalent characters shows how fan mentality can affect a reading of the text, Akiko here is more worried about the concept of a direct and faithful adaptation of what would be Boe's role than the adaption of intent or theme and its relevance to contemporary Japan.

While *Owarinaki* has three major changes to the canon: the setting of the show in contemporary Japan, the 'everybody lives AU' and the replacement of Predestination with that of natural disaster, screenwriter Hamada created an adaptation that is faithful to the message of Hugo's *LM*. By using the lens of the shift between the Heisei and Reiwa eras, *Owarinaki* creates direct parallels between nineteenth-century French and twenty first-century Japanese social inequality, successfully communicating to their audience why a 'foreign classic' is still relevant to the present in Japan. Their recurring phrase 「やり直す」 ['start again'] is a rallying cry to a society who are punished for individualism, encouraging the Japanese audience to 「自分らしく生きよう」 ['live as ourselves']; a highly specific version of Hugo's own attempt to encourage his reader into political activism. While Hugo and Hamada do not share an exact set of ideals, nor are their ideals perfect, it is clear that they have a similar sense of what systems of power they wish to see dismantled in their societies, in their times.

CONCLUSION

While Hugo, Davies and the institution of the BBC can be read as idealistic fellows, Hamada

and Ly, those seen as 'foreign' (despite both identifying as a National of the country of their

adaptation), adapt the text with more nuance. Stam offers the idea of the cross-border gaze

as often being a powerful tool in adaptation, where the 'foreign' adapter has a stronger

understanding of the 'native' writer than fellow natives, positing a capacity for transnational

identity to be more, not less, compatible (Stam 87). Davies is an established BBC period

drama writer. The institution of a BBC One adaptation of a classic text has expectations of

'sumptuous, beautiful, pictorial images [that are] strung together smoothly, slowly and

carefully' (Cardwell 80). This is so much the case that *BBCMis* has a webpage dedicated to

comparing the locations mentioned in the novel with the shoot locations, detailing the

comparative fidelity to architecture for buildings Hugo made up, or have since been

destroyed ("The Paris of *Les Misérables*", *PBS*). Hutcheon links this institutionalisation with

this specific audience's "knowing" of the primary text, suggesting that a BBC One television

viewer is less likely to be a fan of the text and more an appreciator of the spectacle of style.

There is a combination here of institutionalised adaptations becoming cardboard cut-out

productions hiring writers whose intent is textual fidelity to a 'great work', with little to say

about contemporary inequality politics.

Figure 43 A photograph of two Japanese copies of Les Misérables. The copy on the left features a promotional dustcover that advertises Owarinaki Tabiji. The copy on the right has a promotional dustcover for LyMis.

As well as being released within months of one another, both *LyMis* and *BBCMis* were released in Japan, which allows us to compare how the context of release affects a reading of a film. Before the release of *LyMis* and *Owarinaki* in Japan, copies of Hugo's novel were released with special dustcovers that advertised the adaptations (Figure 43). It is clear in the comparison between them what was intended to attract a target audience. *Owarinaki's* advert is dominated by two headshots of Dean Fujioka and the similarly established Iura Arata as Jun and Ryousuke, dramatically lit so that the sides closest to one another are in dark shadow. Behind them captions declare the pair 逃亡者 [the fugitive] and 追跡者 [the tracker], and between them in red is the promise that this is a ドラマ化! [Drama!]. This advert is clearly actor-appeal led, and the red, white and blue French flag colour palette is muted, giving the impression of a gritty police procedural. In comparison the Ladj Ly advert features a wide-shot photograph of the tree and flag-lined Avenue des Champs-Élysées, meeting in the distance at a fog-distorted Arc de Triomphe. Filling the avenue is a crowd of people, some of whom wave French flags. The advertising text lies heavily over this crowd of people and so it is unclear what race they are, or why they are

gathering. The advert gives the sense of intentional mysticality, where the name *Les Misérables* is the only information we get as to what the film is about, implying that in order to sell the film, the film's Blackness had to be reduced to increase its appeal.

As mentioned at the start of this chapter, Japan has less culture of protest like France does, and so political justice movements are understood as 'foreign' issues. The language used in the marketing of *LyMis* in its Japan release voices a frustration with Japan's perception of racism and police brutality being a foreign issue:

「世界各地で暴動やデモが頻発している昨今、もはや日本も他人事ではいられない時代を迎えている。」

[Recently there have been frequent rebellions and demonstrations happening across the world, and Japan is greeting an era where it is no longer possible to see this as another people's issue] ("映画「レ・ミゼラブル」" [Les Misérables Film]).

Despite the tone of allyship, this language is non-urgent and hedging, 'greeting an era' used to excuse the reader from analysing their previous perceptions of race by imagining this moment as a distinct and separate *start* of racial discourse in Japan rather than as something as ingrained into the culture of any country with an imperial history. The marketing language also suggests the producers felt they must do pre-emptive preparation of the film's audience because of the heavily romanticised Japanese gaze of Paris to avoid the onset of Paris Syndrome:

「現在は、パリ郊外の犯罪多発地区の一部とされており、我々が思い描く"花の都"パリのイメージはそこには存在しない。」

[Montfermeil is currently considered a crime-prone area on the outskirts of Paris; the image of Paris as the "city of flowers" that we envision does not exist here].

This statement, included in the website's 'introduction' to the film prefacing the story summary gives a glimpse at what the Japanese distributers assume will cause confusion for a Japanese audience who have absorbed the sterilised image both Western and Japanese creators assign to Paris. This distinct and wilful separation of image and reality in a Japanese audience is tempered through the repetition of the phrases 「衝撃作」 [Shocking work], 「問題作」 [Dilemmatic work], and 「リアル」 [Real / realistic], bonding what they assume will be an audience's reaction: shock, with the demand that the audience treat the context of the work as a *real* dilemma with *real* consequences. To emphasise the topicality of this adaptation, the introduction also includes a statement from President Macron, who is quoted to be taking 'immediate action to improve the living situation' of Montfermeil after watching the film. Yet here again the language distances racism and police brutality from being a Japanese problem, by reporting the film's themes as being 「自国が抱える問題」 [a problem that occurs in his own country], as if anti-Blackness is not a very real and very Japanese problem.

I have shown that through differences in elements like setting, casting and target audience, three adaptations can have radically different approaches to race, gender and other elements of social inequality like sexuality and class. As well as having themes that unsilence Hugo's text such as the legacies of anti-Black policing, the use of despair in the contemporary society and the treatment of minorities, the three productions reveal their implicit biases in their silences: from racial discrimination in Japan to misogyny in communities of colour and colourism in the UK. No one of these three is, or ever can be, a

'perfect' adaptation, but each one has added to the heterocosm of the *LM* universe,

continuing a conversation about Hugo, his novel, his biases, his legacies and his ongoing

relevance.

CHAPTER THREE: Fandom

What does it mean to want
an age- old call
for change
not to change

and yet, also,
to feel bullied
by the call to change?

How is a call to change named shame,
named penance, named chastisement?

How does one say

what if

without reproach? The root

of chastise is to make pure.
The impossibility of that—is that
what repels and not

the call for change?

"i", Claudia Rankine

PART ONE: A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE LES MISÉRABLES FANDOM

This thesis is not a historiography of the *Les Misérables* fandom and so this history will be

brief. While many in the fandom would consider themselves fans of *LM* in all its forms, there

is some crude distinction to be made between subset communities because there are 'of

course, many different types of fans' (Jenkins 1). Some only follow the musical, where

fandom activity might consist of collecting bootleg recordings, musical paraphernalia and

comparing actors across casts. Other fans are concerned with pulling apart the minutia of

the Hugo novel, lovingly dubbed 'the brick', organising this research into locations, people

and law-codes mentioned within the text to understand the novel at a more granular level. Many others congregate on a vast many social media sites to compare films, anime, Hugo's poetry and more. Throughout the following, I mostly concern myself with fans who have participated in the 2012-current era of the fandom, predominantly congregating on tumblr and Discord and uploading fanfiction to the hosting website ArchiveOfOurOwn (AO3). These fans were often introduced to *LM* through the 2012 Hollywood adaptation, which coincided with the marked shift in constructions of online fandom from 'nearly unknown and indecipherable subculture to mainstream behavior' (Hellekson and Busse 5). Cast comparisons, paraphernalia collection and law-codes are of interest to fans here too, though I am more interested in analysing creative output rather than physical or intellectual collection.

The first fanfiction written for the *LM* fandom on AO3 was on the 10th May 2002.[30] There were several throughout 2004-5 by one user, until the first ship fics in 2009 and 2010 began to appear, the fandom growing at an exponential rate through late 2012 and 2013 after the release of the Hollywood film. It is impossible to estimate the population of this or any other fandom because of factors that include a significantly increased desire for privacy amongst fan groups and a non-location-specific internet habitat. For instance, there is a divide between the physical and the online, as well as the sometimes-interconnected but often-unrelated spread of fans between Facebook groups, Twitter, tumblr, tiktok, Discord servers, AO3, Wattpad, FanFiction.net and LiveJournal, before even considering the international fandoms who exist on country-specific fan platforms like Douyin or Bilibili.

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[30] Fanworks for *LM* pre-date this both on- and off-line, but I focus here on the more popular sites used by current fans.

Fandom-wide census surveys have been organised, but as these are highly labour-intensive and come under significant scrutiny when managed poorly (often by well-meaning but unpaid and untrained volunteers), none have been done at scale, or with reliable results. As such, it might instead be useful to provide a comparison with what data is available. *Les Misérables – All Media Types* is the top-most fandom within the Theatre category of AO3 with 24,065 total fics. *Les Misérables* is separated into categories such as – *Victor Hugo* (6,955 works) or *– 2012 film* (5,286), to denote if a fan is specifically writing in a certain 'universe' such as the novel or film, or with the *– All Media Types* tag aggregating everything under the *LM* umbrella. The second-most popular theatre show is *Hamilton* with 19,851 fics, and then the third, *Newsies,* with a sharp drop at 7,959. In comparison the most popular property in the Books & Literature category is *Harry Potter* with 379,196 fics, *Marvel* leads both Movies and Cartoons & Comics & Graphic Novels with 573,336, and *K-pop* stands at 509,475 (with one band, *BTS*, taking a significant 188,960 of those for itself).[31] Only 1% of fandoms have more than 10,000 fanworks, and approximately 62% of fandoms have 5 or fewer fanworks (Toastystats "small fandoms"). This makes the *LM* fandom a considerably dedicated one in theatre and in general, but nowhere near as populated as behemoth franchises are. This is not to say that AO3 is an accurate depiction of population numbers, especially given that many people exist in fandom spaces without participation through the creation of fic on this one website, but it perhaps shows that *LM* has a content-

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[31] This chapter was originally written on 27/06/2021, and the numbers updated on 23/06/2022. In 2021, the *Les Misérables* fandom had 22,239 fics, *Hamilton* had 18,812, *Newsies* had 7,151, *Harry Potter* had 307,712, *Marvel* had 480,167 and BTS had 156,555. While the *LM* increase of 2000 fics far outpaces *Newsies'* 800, it has nothing on the near 70,000 fanfics written in the *Harry Potter* fandom in just one year. Statistics taken from the "Media" landing page from ArchiveOfOurOwn.

creating fan following unlike similarly long-running mainstay musicals of the same era like

The Phantom of the Opera, which has 4,212 fanworks, and *Cats* with only 1,286.

Fandom output is regularly relationship-oriented, with the majority of fans

organising into sub-sects based on their main 'ship'. As one fan pointed out in our interview,

fans of the Barricade Boys have separate Discord servers (such as the Discorinthe)[32] to those

in the Valvert-focused The Sewer Chat[33] (Solomon [1:13:24]). While there is the sense that

these ships both belong to the same community, events like holiday gift exchanges are

typically organised by separate groups so that a fan does not need to write a fic for a

relationship/character they do not have the knowledge of or interest in. While I touch on

queer sexualities through this work, the majority of this chapter will not focus on

investigating same-sex relationships, despite this being a large factor of fandom activity. Of

the 24,065 total *LM* fics on AO3, 16,211 of these are in the Male/Male category, 5,215 are

Gen, 3,270 are Female/Male, 1,253 are Female/Female, and the rest are split between Multi

and Other.[34] Enjolras/Grantaire (ER) was the 72nd most popular ship on AO3 in 2022, down

from 64th in 2021 and 54th in 2020. In 2013, ER was 23rd, in 2014, they were 18th and in 2015,

they reached their height at 17th. No other ship in the *LM* fandom has broken into the top

100, though Coufeyrac/Jean Prouvaire and Cosette/Marius came close in 2013 ranking at

101 and 103rd respectively. Éponine/Cosette did come 25th in the "Femslash" list in 2014 (a

list created to address 'next to no' female/female pairings), though they had a total of 299

fics in comparison to ER's 5504 that year (all stats from Centreoftheselights' "Ship Stats"

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[32] A portmanteau of Discord and Corinthe, the wine shop Les Amis meet at.
[33] A reference to Victor Hugo's sprawling essay on the sewer systems of Paris.
[34] According to user toastystats, AO3 had a significantly higher proportion of Male/Male (49.7%) and Female/Female (8.3%) fanfictions than its competitors Wattpad (19.3%, 3.1%) and Fanfiction.net (16.2%, 3.5%) who wrote more Gen or Female/Male fanfiction (Toastystats "shipping").

series). Amongst other reasons for my not investing time into an investigation of this queerness is Amelia Roberts' thesis dedicated to same-sex desire and intimacy in *LM*, making it redundant for me to undertake the same investigation. I am also less interested in arguing *why* fans are fascinated by these relationships, only to acknowledge that they are, and that this dedication serves as a backdrop for investigating how non-white race and non-cis gender are explored through these works.

NAMING THE WHITE, QUEER, FEMALE FANDOM

Hellekson and Busse state that from its very beginnings, 'media fan fiction has been a female, if not feminist, undertaking', and 'many fandoms still comprise mostly women' (75). Jenkins concurs, stating that this section of fandom is 'largely female, largely white, largely middle class, though it welcomes into its ranks many who would not fit this description' (Jenkins 1). The fanfiction-writing fan space is often praised as being 'the first place where a woman is encouraged to enjoy her sexual fantasies and praised for the dirtiness of her imagination' (Coppa 21-2), and fanfiction historians often use the pronouns she/her to describe the general fanfiction-writing community. However Hellekson and Busse note that gay, 'lesbian, bi, and trans fans, fans of color, queer fans— all are now vocal and visible, and fan fiction, particularly slash,[35] can no longer be considered the aegis of straight white women' (80). According to one informal poll, the fanfiction community that cross-posts on tumblr in 2023 is mostly occupied by cis, queer women, followed by non-binary people,

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[35] 'Slash' is fandom slang for male/male relationships, getting its name from the forward slash used in pairing formulations.

trans men and cis, heterosexual women.[36] As mentioned above, there has been no

conclusive demographic study of the fandom, but given the fairly significant overlap with

other fandoms, a majority cis female, minority non-binary and transgender male fandom is

likely representative. Race is even more difficult to quantify (as will be discussed below),

though most participants of my interviews mentioned a vague sense of 'vibe' when I asked

why they presumed the fandom was a majority-white one. Solomon [they/them, Asian

American], stated anecdotally:

> I've talked about issues of racial justice [in Discord]. And it is predominantly white.
>
> People will say that they're white, […] it's not just like, "Hey guys, how's it going? I'm
>
> white", [but] it'll come up, you know, so I feel like I have a pretty solid scope of what
>
> that space looks like and it is predominantly white. [Solomon 1:13:24]

Stanfill argues that mainstream media 'constructs fandom as a nonheteronormative variety

of whiteness, positioning the supposed inadequacy of fans as the result of substandard […]

self-control' (Stanfill 2011, 1.2). The white fan's inability to control themself is linked with

the stereotype of a 'lazy' Black person, depreciating the value of their 'white' monicker

(*Ibid.,* 2.6). This insufficiency is, however, part of Stanfill's ongoing study of mostly-male fan

spaces not studied here, and Stanfill concludes that deviant whiteness is still whiteness,

where privilege is 'regainable for fans' (2016, 195), and so we should not dismiss the

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[36] In a self-selecting survey of 85,636 fandom users organised by user @asha-the-confused-lolita under the title "if you have ever written any fanfiction, tell me your identity", the largest representation was 'cis queer women' at 29.4%, 'other/prefer not to tell/see the results' at 22.7%, 'nonbinary person' at 22.6%, 'trans queer man' at 10%, 'cis het woman' at 9.5%, with 'trans het woman', 'trans queer woman', 'cis het man', cis queer man' and 'trans het man' each under 3%. The 'other' category likely includes fans who do not write fanfiction. Though this poll only represents fanfiction writers who also inhabit the tumblr space and thus not representative of all fanfiction writers, we might see this as having fairly significant overlap with the fans considered in this thesis as sharing the same space.

whiteness in play as if fans can be considered exempt from conversations about race through their marginalisation in other spheres. I will later consider the difficulties of racializing this fandom, but I believe that it is not unfair to quantify the *LM* fandom in this thesis as being one that is majority white, female, cisgender and queer, with a minority that are non-white and non-cisgender.

FANDOM, RECURRING TROPES, AND RACISM

Wanzo considers how fandom is often crafted using the language of ostracization, yet the topic of race within fandom is 'frequently treated as an add-on or as something that should be addressed somewhere later' in fan criticism (Wanzo 1.6), likely because 'space itself is one of the understood privileges of whiteness' (Rankine 41). While 'white women have been focusing on issues of gender' in fan studies, there is an 'immense gap when it comes to dealing with race' (Gatson and Reid 4.12). Hellekson and Busse note that Constance Penley's *NASA/Trek* is an 'early example of a text that addresses the limitations of fandom, in particular how the focus on feminist issues tends to push aside any concerns of race and class' (13). Penley builds on Leslie Fiedler's discovery of the formulation of the queer couple in American fiction being 'one light and one dark', in which the 'stuffiness of home yields to the wigwam' and the white, heterosexuality of a wife is less preferable to the 'natural primitivism of the colored man', tracking this onto the development modern homoerotic fanfiction (Penly 184). But as Wanzo argues, works like Penly's often privilege 'a utopian understanding of fans […] as being antiracist and progressive' (1.4). This can be seen especially in Penly's conclusion, in which she argues that Kirk/Spock fanfiction writers 'have eliminated its racism by celebrating miscegenation' (Penly 190); a too-neat conclusion to what is an otherwise complex and knotted consideration of race in fandom. Jenkins admits

that in his initial publication of *Textual Poachers*, he was 'less eager to focus attention on conflicts within fandom—around gender, race, class, religion, politics, generation—not wanting to air the community's dirty laundry in public' (xxix), and even in response to Suzanne Scott's question about broader efforts to diversify fun studies regarding race, Jenkins talks about the move to incorporate international fandoms and decentralise knowledge of USA-specific culture, not about efforts to incorporate criticism around the space occupied by fans of colour within Western fandoms; internationalising race rather than turning inwards.

It was only relatively recently that fan scholarship in general acknowledged that fandoms are not the 'utopic' spaces they're often imagined as in the fan consciousness, as researchers begin to release their work on racism in fandom (Johnson 2019 1.4; Gatson and Reid 3.1). Wanzo posits that one of the reasons 'race may be neglected is because it troubles some of the claims—and desires—at the heart of fan studies scholars and their scholarship', namely the 'romanticisation of fan exceptionalness' to counterbalance the general media representation (Wanzo 1.4; 2.2). But as Wanzo says, '[s]exism, racism, and xenophobia are routinely visible in fan communities', and there must be wider recognition that an investment in whiteness is foundational to some groups of fans (1.4), even if it means being perceived as someone 'sucking the pleasure out of fan studies by demanding the inclusion of race analysis (Wanzo 5.1). In 2019, Abigail De Kosnik and andré carrington[37] edited a special edition of *Transformative Works and Cultures* (TWC) that focused on fans and fandoms of colour, stating that despite fan studies' lengthy resistance of 'Western structures of oppression and exclusion', most notably 'foregrounding how gender and

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[37] The author chooses to use lower case letters for his name.

sexuality operate in fan sites and communities', the perspectives of people of colour 'have

not been widely represented or analysed in fan scholarship to date' (De Kosnik and

carrington 2019 1.2). What is clear, however, was that even in this issue of TWC, the authors

did not spotlight racism within specific works in fandom, erring towards the racism of the

original media (Florini 2019; Rendell 2019; Guarriello 2019), or focusing on the body of the

fans themselves as racialised individuals (Johnson 2019; Thomas and Stornaiuolo 2019).

Jenkins argues that fandom contains 'both negative and positive forms of

empowerment', and Penly observes one aspect of this, where white male fans, emasculated

by their fan status (Stanfill 2011; 2016), attempt to use homophobic and sexist language to

regain power within their fan community (Penly 187), but there has yet to be a full-length

study on how queer, white female fans wield power. If these find empowerment through

fandom by destroying patriarchal ideas of femininity, we must also consider how this power

is wielded and when other structures of power are upheld. As hooks states, when liberal

white people

> fail to understand how they can and/or do embody white-supremacist values and
>
> beliefs even though they may not embrace racism as prejudice or domination […]
>
> they cannot recognize the ways their actions support and affirm the very structure of
>
> racist domination and oppression that they profess to see eradicated (2015, 113).

What is critical to understand about the perpetuation of racism within fandom is that

fandom is a cultural space that, 'like traditional folk culture, constructs a group identity,

articulates the community's ideals, and defines its relationship to the outside world' (Jenkins

273), passing these skills and norms down informally across generations (Jenkins xxvii).

Coppa states that in a society like ours, where 'storytelling has been industrialized to the

point that our shared culture is owned by others', it is unsurprising that fanfiction is what

has become of the communal desire to retell local legends, drinking songs and ghost stories

(Coppa 7). Hellekson and Busse agree, arguing that fanfiction 'often retells the same events

and scenes, but from different points of view, with myriad extensions and elaborations [...]

The theme of the fan community creating a popular myth has been a central facet of fan

studies' (21). What they do not discuss is what and *who* gets included within these myths,

and how these are passed on through these recurring tropes and relied-upon shorthands.

Though Hellekson and Busse consider how feminist retellings parallel the fanfiction

desire to 'modify and correct the vast number of texts still clearly geared to white men' (23),

race and racial tropes are not the focus in their *Fan Fiction Studies Reader*. Jenkins argues

that fanfiction often brings background characters to the foreground, calling this a

'refocalization' that tends to favour women and minorities, who receive limited screen time

(Jenkins 252), but agrees in his preface to the twentieth anniversary edition of *Textual*

Poachers that the initial 'focus on women as fans resulted in some hasty and easy

generalizations about the ways that fan reading practices were tied exclusively to

marginalized perspectives' (xix). As an example, inspired by Samuel Delany's *Racism and*

Science Fiction, in 2002 blogger @zvi_likes_tv wrote that racism in fandom needed to be

understood not just through fans' hatred but by their 'habits of thought':

> People don't think to slash black guys, even when they're occupying niches where
>
> slash would naturally flow forth if the role were played by a white guy. […] I'm
>
> assuming that part of the reason they don't slash black guys is because our
>
> foresmutters also didn't slash black guys.

Creating an ancestry of mothers who write smut in the pun 'fore/smutters', this user makes explicit the deficit of fanfiction written about Black male characters, comparing when these side characters are elevated to fandom popularity and observing how rare it is for Black people to be the subject of refocalization. Though it has been twenty years since this blog post, a new generation of smutters carries the same aversion: in 2010, a user named Glockgal produced the *Fanservice Sequel,* a comic 'directed at fans who claim race doesn't matter to them':

> it depicts a Supernatural fangirl who stops liking her favorite characters once they're not white. Here, as is so often the case in fandom, the personal becomes political, and popular culture becomes a means of tackling important cultural issues of desire and of representation' (Coppa 208)

It is a short comic, but one that depicts the new generation of fans carrying the same focus as their mothers. While fandom historians like Coppa observe the rejoicing that occurred in *The Force Awakens* fandom with the celebration of Finn and Poe, the first time a *Star Wars* film had a main male/male ship where both men were of colour, privileging the story of an 'escaped slave' who becomes a hero (Coppa 248), with hindsight it is hard not to be cynical about the fact that though Poe/Finn has nearly 9,000 fanfictions, the relatively obscure white male/male ship Kylo Ren/Hux has nearly 13,000, and the white female/male ship Kylo Ren/Rey has nearly 24,000.[38] Because part of the 'process of becoming a fan involves learning the community's preferred reading practices' (Jenkins 278), these examples track how habits of thought become pervasive within fandom, with fans often opting to devote

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[38] Numbers taken from the '*Star Wars* – All Media Types' tag on AO3 in August 2023.

themselves to more niche or more heteronormative characters when faced with characters of colour, especially those who are Black.

I do not believe that the fanartists in the *LM* fandom are enacting bigotry on a conscious level. Stereotypes are effective short-hands, and their insidiousness lies in how easy it is for characteristics to map onto races. This is not to say, however, that this behaviour is not racist. As Blum states, stereotyping is a 'form of misrelationship', and this 'constitutes a form of disrespect' (Blum 283), no matter the complicity or self-awareness of the stereotyper with explicit feelings of prejudice. While these artists may not be conflating race with personality traits on purpose, it still has the effect of upholding harmful stereotypes and doing damage to the audiences of colour within the fandom. Pattern recognition within fandom is important for all fans. The simplicity of laying out data in the most basic forms is 'revelatory' because fans can 'go straightaway into strategies to deal with a pattern of oppression' instead of seeing these as 'personal' faults (Deepa D. qtd. in TWC Editor "Pattern Recognition"). Thus, by observing the patterns perpetuated in the *LM* fandom, passed to them by their foremothers, we can make 'transparent the ways in which pleasures and fears around bodies' circulates (Wanzo 5.1): what stories are reproduced, retold, circulated, and what (and who) is left out.

ETHICS IN FAN THEORY

The ethics of fan theory is an ongoing discussion and one that focuses on: a) what might be considered a privacy violation in an online space, b) the relationship between fans and researchers, and c) how spaces that are seen as 'safe' can be damaged by research (Hellekson and Busse 4). Jenkins notes that Acafans 'recognise that what we put into print matters, that academic claims carry cultural weight, and can have consequences for those

depicted in our accounts' (xiii). While fanworks are posted online and are technically

considered public, Acafan scholars have argued that these works are published in enclaves:

that to access this work, one must understand how to navigate a hosting website such as

tumblr or ArchiveOfOurOwn, and so to take the work out of this platform is to amplify the

work to an audience it was not initially intended to be seen by (Reid 2016 qtd. Dym and

Fiesler 2020 2.5). The clearest example of fanwork being amplified to a new audience was in

2014, when Graham Norton asked actors James McAvoy and Michael Fassbender to re-

enact fanworks his research team had found online ("MF and JM's fan art romance", *BBC*).

The authors of these fanworks had not been consulted, and while the actors praised the

content creators, the intent of the segment was clearly to encourage the audience to mock

the practise of fandom, causing 'a great deal of hurt and embarrassment to everyone

involved' (Booth 2.12). Even works well renowned for their origins in the fan sphere like E. L.

James' *Fifty Shades* trilogy, whose change in audience from private (fandom) to public (for

international sale) was an intentional amplification, gained negative reactions for their

previous fic status. As Britta Lundin summarises, the 2015 hashtag #AskELJames trended for

hours as critics of her work took the opportunity to say 'So, you're a 52yo woman writing

Twilight rape fantasy fanfic & admit to crushing on Robert Pattinson. How many cats do you

have?' (@MicheleMMusic) and 'On behalf of all authors, I'd like to thank the internet for

#AskELJames, who isn't included in that because fan fiction doesn't count!'

(@ianthomasmalone). More recently, C4 announced a new show, *The Really Really Rude*

Puppet Show where celebrities 'read an erotic piece of creative writing where the celeb is

the lead protagonist'. The show claims to 'showcase new fan fiction writing and, with the

help of top script editors, bring the best stories to screen' (*TVZoneUK* "Puppets"). Fanfiction

writers spread awareness on tumblr, warning other fans that producers had been reaching

out to them via their AO3 fics, once again raising worries about consent and accreditation, while also noting the condescending tone used in marketing copy, where producers were willing to capitalise on fanfiction, but mocked their authors while doing so. This breach of fandom space by the unintended audience sparked an awareness in fandom about unwanted attention, and a fear that by participating in research or in talking to those outside of the fan space, a fan might have their work appropriated for the purpose of mockery.

In addition to fears of mockery through amplification, in their survey of fan feelings about the use of fanworks in research, Dym and Fiesler also highlight how LGBTQ members of fandom are 'particularly vulnerable to privacy risks, especially if they are still in the closet', where a researcher's choice not to consult fan on their inclusion in research might unintentionally out that person because of the new context of their visibility (Dym and Fiesler 2020 4.4). There is also a particular concern when not anonymising data because of the rise of anti-fandom, 'where certain fan groups would maliciously target other fans who were participating in ways they did not approve of', punishing people they deem unacceptable with harassment and through doxxing because of their relationship with researchers (Dym and Fiesler 2020 4.26). Doxxing, the practise of revealing a user's private information such as their address or social security number, has become a form of 'digital vigilantism', often done in group hunts for the purpose of making a victim vulnerable or to humiliate, carried out 'in the name of justice, order or safety' (Loveluck 227). In one of the largest current fandoms, that of the boyband BTS, Black fans who speak out about race in the fandom (including the boyband's appropriation of Blackness and fans using photos of George Floyd's murder as a meme about one album out-selling (murdering) another), have

been repeatedly doxxed, and have had their families threatened, in the name of regulating or protecting fandom spaces (South Sonder "Online Vigilantism").

To counteract this, Dym and Fiesler highlight that the importance of moving beyond the 'one-size-fits-all' understanding of how one might attempt research in the fan sphere, noting some recommended practices including: 'taking steps to obscure public data by rewriting sentences to paraphrase and other methods of ethical fabrication […] Obscuring data can allow researchers to delve into contentious or sensitive subjects in fandom without potentially putting community members at risk' (Dym and Fiesler 2020 5.10). These concerns about fan privacy skew towards the idea that it is better to be safe than sorry, encouraging 'obtaining permission, obscuring data, attribution, giving back, and learning community norms' (Dym and Fiesler 2020 5.18) when conducting research on fans.

The submission guidelines on the fanworks journal *Transformative Works and Cultures* (TWC) 'strongly recommends that permission be obtained from the creator for any fanwork or blog post cited in a submitted article' and that artwork may be 'directly hotlinked only with [the artist's] permission.' They do however state that:

> TWC […] is committed to the free expression of ideas, particularly in the context of scholarly activity about derivative fan artworks. Therefore, we do not *require* the consent, explicit or implicit, of the original author of a transformative work […] All citation URLs to such texts need only be open to the public ("Author Guidelines", *TWC,* emphasis mine).

One clear flaw in this dedication to obtaining permission is that the 'fans first approach does not always make for the best scholarship', especially when 'a community might be actively hostile toward the researcher' (Dym and Fiesler 2020 2.7). There are very few

methodologies for how to navigate gaining permission for criticisms of fanworks when dealing with race and racism in fandom, and what few there are (such as Wanzo, Fazekas and Pande's) mention fear, censorship, and an unwillingness to engage with fans at the risk of the researcher's personal or digital safety. As Rukmini Pande argues throughout her work, 'the framing of media fan communities as subcultural and powerless vis-á-vis the producers of popular media texts has also allowed for their unproblematic slotting into a vulnerable site/space', essentially allowing fans a type of immunity from criticisms of neo-colonial power imbalances (Pande 2020b 1.4). In Pande's ethnographical writing on how her own race has affected her research, she addresses this methodological question of permission:

> what if one is discussing fan work that is racist or otherwise discriminatory? It is highly unlikely that most fan creators would permit scholars to characterize their work as racist or be willing to have it discussed with that framework (2020b 2.17).

Pande continues by stating that in one study of racism in fanworks:

> my coauthor and I received significant pushback from multiple peer reviewers who were uncomfortable with such specificity [of how fan works were cited]. Their contention, which was significant, was that this framing would highlight only certain individuals and perhaps open them up to negative repercussions beyond what was warranted for their production of problematic fan art in an online setting (2020b 2.18).

Pande asserts that the 'implication of the discussion is that the possible discomfort of the fanartists was privileged over and above the ongoing discomfort caused to fans (including fans of color)' (2020b 2.19), and that this hierarchy of discomfort reinforces the white

supremacist mindset that would rather cause harm to the silenced communities of colour over the potentially vocal white artists (2020b 2.20). Without scrutiny, this behaviour is then replicated without consequence, repeating and upholding structures of power that privilege whiteness, all the while claiming to endorse an apolitical 'neutrality'. Pande and her co-author ultimately chose to anonymise the artwork in their piece and to only describe the work in vague terms, but in subsequent publications (including Pande's edited collection *Fandom, Now in Color*) Pande chooses not to anonymise and pander to white discomfort.

One researcher in the edited collection, Angie Fazekas, highlights certain individuals' works in their research. In their work on the sexualisation of slavery in fandom, Fazekas not only names the fics and their authors, but quotes directly from the works, making it relatively simple to track these works online for those literate in doing so. Fazekas follows Pande's thinking about how we as researchers 'need to talk about racism/white supremacy in fandom and we're not always, or often, going to get author's permission to use their work to do that', and so used the following method:

> If I'm using a fic as a positive/neutral example, I will also make an attempt to ask the author for permission. A lot of fic authors, especially of older stories, don't always respond, so I go with the guideline of naming the fic, but not the author in that case. […] When it comes to examples of racist fanwork, it's more complicated. […] So in that case, I go with the policy of again, naming the work and not the author. So it's searchable if people want to go looking, but I'm not naming people directly.[39]

[39] Personal correspondence with Fazekas 17/03/21

Because of the linked nature of fan spaces, it is not difficult to track a user's social media accounts, which may or may not include that user's personal information. While Fazekas does not include the user's personal information in their work, it could be argued that even including the username, or any identifiable information about the work, opens the user to attack. I believe, however, that Fazekas does balance user privacy with the need to provide evidence. In their work, Fazekas concludes that these sexual slavery fanworks 'serve to co-opt and trivialize slavery while absolving white readers of any need to acknowledge the horrors perpetrated by white people' (Fazekas 106). This is not a light accusation, and to completely bleach the work from scrutiny or quoted example would be to make an argument without standing. To do so would also protect white supremacy from visibility, which is another way it continues to be propagated without consequence.

Finally, calls for anonymisation are infantilising. There is a desire in fan spaces to see fanworks considered as, as Lundin phrased it, "real" writing, where some fans feel disappointment or resentment at being treated as lesser than published writers. Yet it is only once fans are criticised about racism that we are informed that we as Acafans must consider the fan's safety or privacy, and that we must protect fanworks from what is deemed undue attention. I believe that there is an intended audience for fanworks, and I agree that fanworks should not be amplified beyond this, but to argue that fanworks cannot be scrutinised and deconstructed to analyse fan racism implies that fans of colour are *not* the intended audience, and that (white) fans would rather sacrifice any esteemed status than face the consequences of unmitigated and unexamined racism.

MY METHOD

My research into fandom is twofold. First, a quantitative study of publicly available fanworks (including fanart hosted on tumblr and fanfiction on AO3), followed by a qualitative set of interviews that asks fans of colour to talk about their experiences in the *LM* fandom. I have included several references to fanfiction, each of which I refer to by its title and not by its author. I do not include a link to these works in the bibliography, though I do reference their upload date, formatted similarly to a published book. These works are therefore searchable, but by not including a clickthrough link, I have decreased accessibility and thus visibility.

In spreadsheet one (Appendix 7) I have chosen 465 works of fanart from 210 artists, separated into sheets by general groupings, cataloguing the skin colour and races depicted in each work. I have given each work an ID number so that when talking about individual work in this thesis I am not naming an artist directly. As Stephanie Wildman argues, to 'label an individual a racist veils the fact that racism can only occur where it is culturally, socially, and legally supported' (Wildman 887-8). My hope is that by first undertaking a quantitative study that does not link directly to or display fanwork in this thesis or in its figures, we can understand that a general criticism of these works is not intended as individual attacks but as an analysis of collective trends. Booth highlights the neoliberalistic turn of fandom, which polices individual activity over the idea of communal responsibility (Booth 1.3), encouraging us to continue to be aware that white supremacy is not a private, singular feature but an institutional one. Every work considered in greater detail in this research is thus described as per an image description in the style of alt text (modelled on those written to provide access to a Blind or partially sighted person). While it may thus be possible for a fan within the fandom to search out this work of art through description alone, I am not providing data that can be reverse image-searched and thus link back to the artist's blog.

I also take hope from Acafan JSA Lowe's commentary in her writing about race in fandom:

As a white person with privilege, I want every single time I have been in error, and been fortunate enough to have that error pointed out to me, to ring out for as long as possible, like a struck tuning fork. [...] The wretchedly uncomfortable hot sting of guilt is as vitally necessary as the flashlight bobbing in the darkness ahead (Lowe 2019 2.10).

Here Lowe highlights guilt as the immediate and visceral response to error, but also to the growth and learning that comes from being 'fortunate' enough to having such errors pointed out. The phrasing of the statement allows that to have errors pointed out is a *fortune* and not an *attack*, an opportunity for investigation, healing and new creative bounds. As Claudia Rankine considers in *Just Us*, there is nuance to be had with the personal and the institutional in conversations about race: when shunned at an party for unsettling the otherwise all-white guests and positioned as an 'angry Black woman', she finds herself wanting to shout at everyone, including herself: "Let's get over ourselves, it's structural not personal" (178). Yet Rankine also suggests that the personal is an unavoidable challenge on the path to structural change because we all bring out 'fears' and our 'expectations' to our exchanges. In putting together this data, I do not intend to mock or to harass artists, nor do I wish to see this work deleted, but I want to put a quantitative figure on what has, unto this point, been an unremarked upon trend in this fandom. I include Lowe not because I believe I require white permission to engage in this work, but to serve as a reminder that it is not just academics of colour who must combat racism within fandom and in fandom studies – and that this work is a criticism of the racist institutions we *all* live in, though it might at times

feel like personal slight. It is also worth stating that neither racism nor colourism are problems that exist in solely white spaces, nor just in Western or Global Northern ones, and racism will continue to be upheld by people of all races.

I opted to use tumblr over rivals like Twitter or DeviantArt because despite being called a 'dead' or 'dying' website (Swisher, *NYT*), tumblr achieved 316,211,837 visits a day in March 2021,[40] up from a reported 47,490,000 in its so-called heyday in March 2013 (Bercovici, *Forbes*). While tumblr has been alive since 2007, its height began in 2012 and its active userbase grew 120% in mid-2014 (Lunden, *TechCrunch*), many fanartists making the transfer from DeviantArt, an art hosting website that has portfolio-style pages, towards the more communal feed style of tumblr. The Hollywood adaptation of the stage musical was released in the United States on 25th December 2012 and in the UK on 11th January 2013, which happened to align with the rise of tumblr fandom. *LM* made it to number 5 in the list of "Most Reblogged in 2013: Movies", a summary that tumblr staff publish as part of their Year in Review, behind the mainstay *Harry Potter* and enormous fandom of *The Avengers,* but above *The Lord of the Rings*, *Star Wars*, and the recently released *Thor 2*. Unlike Twitter, which has seen a rise in fanblogs, or Discord, which is the oft-used communication platform for fandoms, tumblr has a regularity and un-changingness from its 2012 self, which makes it a more useful tool for analysis across a decade.

To find the artwork, I searched for characters through the hashtag of their individual, group or relationship name, i.e. #Jean-Valjean, #Les-Amis or #Valvert, respectively. I sorted posts by Post Type: Photo, which limits results to image posts (rather than text/audio/video). The general search function of tumblr does not have advanced features

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[40] According to sitechecker.pro, an online traffic checker.

like other social media sites do, and it is also fairly notorious for hiding posts[41] and so to widen the net as much as possible, I first sorted results by 'Most Popular', then by 'Most Recent' (the only two ways to filter in search), but I do not claim to have found every piece of art posted in the fandom. The general search function also limits the search to results posted since 2017. The only way to get around this date limit is to find a specific user's blog, find their personal #art or #les-mis tag and to scroll through their posts manually. For this first spreadsheet I believed this to be both too labour-intensive and infringed on a user's personal sphere too greatly. I therefore had a limit set for posts between 23 December 2017 to the present, which at the time of research was 6 March 2021. I decided to make a second spreadsheet (Appendix 8) to counteract this, as I was aware that the fandom of 2017-21 had become decidedly less attached to the 2012 film and would not reflect an accurate portrayal of how race has been depicted historically. I will talk more about this second spreadsheet below.

I show what colour skin the characters have through a cell coloured with a hex number (e.g. #a96a3f is filled with a yellow-toned light brown). I used the website imagecolorpicker.com, which has a colour picker function that provides the user with the HEX colour code value. I chose this website because the tool works in-browser and so I did not have to download any work, thus reducing the chance of a mix-up of data. I also chose this site because of their data protection policy, in which they state that no data is sent, and so my using this website on images does not have an adverse effect on the fanartists' data. In artwork that had a severe overlay or had extremes in lighting, I picked a median colour

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[41] The most likely cause is tumblr's porn ban, where its algorithm automatically sorts posts as 'adult content' based on a very faulty AI. This may also prevent non-adult content that has been flagged from becoming searchable (Fallon, *digg*).

from where I could make a reasonable assumption that an area was not in highlight or in shadow. If this was difficult in a specific work, I made a note in the 'notes' column. It was often easier to pick colour from digital work than from traditionally drawn ones since these are most often uploaded as photographs taken on a phone, where the true colour envisioned for the work is not reflected in the image uploaded. Some prolific artists had several posts with the same portrayals, and so I only included one version per artist, though did include multiple works by the same artist if their portrayals were significantly different.

When choosing fanworks I excluded pencil sketches, black and white images, cosplay or fan edits of photographs and fanart that was too darkly lit to get an accurate idea of skin tone. I included some monochromatic images when there was a clear distinction in shades for skin colour (as in img156 and img165). By not including pencil sketches and black and white images, this data skews to favour works that feature characters of colour, as there was a general trend of a pervasive whiteness in non-coloured artwork (165/241 were white, 3 were Asian, 6 were Black, the others were unclear due to art style or of ambiguous race). This may be because of one general trend I noticed, which was that racialised characters who were often portrayed with darker skin were drawn with features similar to their white counterparts, where artists chose to denote race only by skin colour and not through features such as the elevation of nose bridges, different width and types of noses, hair textures, eye shapes, mouth shapes, eyebrow types or any other features that might be unique to certain ethnicities. This suggests that while the majority of artists are keen to create artwork with racially diverse casts, an understanding of race often begins and ends at skin pigment, which is less obvious in uncoloured works. I will analyse this further in part two of this chapter.

It is at this point that I will note that racialisation is obviously not solely visualised by skin tone. The point of this spreadsheet is not to argue that people with darker skin are categorically 'more' of colour than those with lighter skin. It does, however, touch upon how colourism, the oft-overlooked relation of racism, can be visualised in a fandom as a whole when skin colour is treated quantitively across the works of 210 artists. When we can see the clear trend of four characters portrayed almost exclusively as dark-skinned (Javert, Combeferre, Bossuet, Musichetta; Figure 44; 45), we must ask ourselves why, and what this choice says about the fandom as a whole. One clear disadvantage to categorising the characters of *LM* in fanart into racial groups by my own personal preconceived notions of what I deemed to be the visual indicators of certain ethnicities was that I was essentially falling into the trap of racial taxonomy by making this database. As Bernice Schrank argues, 'discriminating gatekeepers need to invest heavily in their ability to discern ethnicity based on look' when there is a sparseness and unreliability of identity markers in assimilated groups (Schrank 21). This served as a useful source of inspiration for one of this chapter's leading arguments: that *LM* fanart often encourages us to decode a character's race by taxonomical features alone because of a lack of any other indicator of ethnic or cultural background.

Figure 4428 A screenshot of a spreadsheet. The columns are a list of characters: Valjean, Javert, Fantine, Cosette, Marius, Éponine, Gavroche, Enjolras, Grantaire, Combeferre, Courfeyrac, Bahorel, Feuilly, Jehan, Bossuet, Joly, Musichetta. Skin tones are colour picked and displayed with their HEX codes in the rows.

Figure 45 The same labelled images from the above screenshot, but now ordered from light-skinned to dark. Joly, Fantine, Jehan and Cosette have the lightest skin. Javert, Bossuet and Combeferre have the darkest skin.

THE SECOND SPREADSHEET

Within the limits of this project I decided that it was not possible to go through over two hundred users' blogs from the first spreadsheet to undertake a systematic search of their artwork from 2012 until the present, and so I decided to create a second spreadsheet that was a case study of 10 users, analysing a total of 1060 works in a comprehensive review of their entire portfolios. These users are completely anonymised. I chose artists who had a consistent posting rate, looking for artists who had posted regularly between 2013 and 2021. I chose artists who posted more regularly between 2013-17 to fill the gap left by the general search above that only searched from 2017 onwards. I was limited in my choice of

users for two reasons: first, several long-standing fanartists with significant quantities of art have deleted their blogs, and second because some artists do not have consistent art tags.

Regarding the first, it is still possible to view the art made by users who have deleted their blogs by finding the work through reblogs, the ghosts of artwork only visible on other people's pages without the original artist's tags or original posting stamp. It is likely that these artists made the transition from hobbyist to professional artist and opted to delete their tumblr so as to either 'clean' their professional image from an association with potentially copyright-infringing fanart or to protect their digital portfolio from being associated with their fan persona. We can see the legacy of one now-deleted tumblr artist in the 'misc. character work' gallery of illustrator Sas Milledge's digital portfolio ("Character Design"). I believed it would be both too labour intensive and a violation of privacy to carry out a comprehensive review of works by artists who had clearly intended to wipe their searchability from the internet, and so disregarded these ghosts.

Regarding the second, tumblr is a microblogging site that displays posts chronologically in one feed, mixing all of a user's posts on their blog unless categorised with tags. Tags operate primarily as archival on tumblr similar to a blogging website as opposed to their use on Twitter to participate in trends. These tags are user determined and are affected by human error like misspellings, or by users having distinct tags for finished works and sketches, or a user not tagging a work by fandom and only tagging by character (or even a personal nickname for that character). I have thus been as comprehensive as possible in building these portfolios while remaining aware that many users might have posted art under other tags, or indeed without tags. User4, for example, only began tagging their posts in 2014, so their work before then is not analysed here. I used tumblr's Archive function, which displays a thumbnail of every post a user has posted, filterable by post type and the

user's tags. I either opted for a user's #My-Art or #Les-Mis tag, whichever was easier to use to decipher that art was drawn by the user, and was *LM* fanart. This narrowed my pool of artists, as I opted for ten users who primarily stayed within the *LM* fandom and posted little else to their blogs.

I colour-picked the skin colours of each character depicted using the same HEX code method as the first spreadsheet. I also noted specific facial features for characters that seemed to be depicted as non-white to gather more quantitative data as to whether characters are depicted more often by skin tone only or by overall features. In the notes for these users I specified whether the depiction was either a) based on a specific adaptation (e.g. "2012", "BBC"), b) Brick-based, meaning character design heavily associated with the novel's descriptions, often taking inspiration from the original illustrations by Gustave Brion, c) Original, character design I deemed to be significantly different from any direct adaptation, or d) Combo, an amalgamation of popular headcanons and specific adaptations. Adaptations like the *BBC* production and the various stage musical casts have a slightly more prominent visual influence on fanworks in the second spreadsheet than the 2012 film (36 cases vs. 31).

INTERVIEWS

I wanted to supplement this quantitative data with qualitative, with the specific aim of asking other fans of colour what their perception of the *LM* fandom was and whether they had noticed the same trends I had noticed while collecting this data. This was in part inspired by Sarah Whitfield, who asked 350 people about their connections to the musical, asking 'what was it that they love so much?' to understand how 'we end up *feeling* so much' about it (2019, 8; 10). I posted my call for participants on 1 April 2021 on tumblr and

received 220 notes (106 likes, 113 reblogs). I received 21 responses to my screening form, zero participants of whom were screened out. I recorded 9 interviews and received 2 written responses.[42] I sent each participant the same questions pre-interview (Appendix 6) so that they had a chance to formulate their ideas, and to send me an advance warning should they wish to opt out of a specific question. No participant opted out of any question. The audio interviews were conducted online through the website *Zencastr* or via Zoom, neither of which required the making of an account with a real name. I stated at the top of the interview that, with permission, the interviews would be edited for release via the podcast *Bread and Barricades,* but stressed that the interviewee would have multiple opportunities to veto anything recorded within set deadlines. I offered to conduct interviews in English or in Japanese (Appendix 5).

There were five sections to the interview:

1) Personal Information: I asked all participants to provide a name (this could be a preferred name, a username/pseudonym, or completely anonymised) and some optional demographic details (race, gender, pronouns). If they gave specific consent, I linked this demographic data with their responses where pertinent.

2) Les Mis: I asked participants to give me a general history of their consumption of *LM* texts. This had the dual intention of setting the interviewee up as an expert, allowing them to gain comfort in listing their knowledge base, and helping me guide my questions towards either a more adaptation, novel or fannish focused set of clarifications.

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[42] Transcripts available on request.

3) Fandom: I asked participants about their level of current and historic engagement with the *LM* fandom and how that compared to their other fandoms so that I could gauge consumption in context.

4) Race & Racism: I asked participants about the treatment of race in the novel, adaptations and in fandom. I also asked whether the participants had ever vocalised their discomfort with this treatment, as I wanted to encourage a conversation about whether participants felt any constraints in protesting racism in the fandom.

5) Euphoria: I ended by asking participants to note any instances where they thought race and/or gender had been treated positively in fandom. I left this question to last because I wanted to encourage a sense of positivity after what would likely be distressing conversations.

In future research I would be interested in interviewing participants from previous/current French colonies. It is a weakness of this work that my spoken French was not strong enough to offer interviews in languages outside of Japanese or English. It is also worth noting that fans of colour I interviewed highlighted how within this specific subsect of fandom, there were more East and Southeast Asian and Latin American people represented than Black people of any nationality. There was some discussion within the group of participants as to why this might be, including mentions that the show has toured to Manila, Seoul, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Buenos Aires, São Paulo and Mexico City with Cape Town being the only city in the continent of Africa the show has toured to, but I would like to take more time in a future project to focus specifically on finding Black participants from across nationalities/ethnic/cultural backgrounds to address this question.

POSITIONALITY AS A TRANS ACAFAN OF COLOUR

Like Jenkins, when I write about fan culture, 'I write *both* as an academic (who has access to certain theories of popular culture, certain bodies of critical and ethnographic literature, and as a fan (who has access to the particular knowledge and traditions of that community). (5, emphasis his). Amy Tooth Murphy's study *Listening In, Listening Out* was greatly influential to my consideration of my positionality as an interviewer, both as a TPOC and as an active fan interviewing other transgender fans of colour. Tooth Murphy asks us to reframe subjectivity (and specifically queer subjectivity) from an undesirable side-effect of the researcher's unmaskable identit(ies) to a desired, purposeful one, arguing that cis/straight whiteness has long been deemed an objective and desired control identity when it is, in itself, just as subjective a position as any other. Jenkins too notes that the danger of identity as an influence on criticism 'is not substantially lessened by adopting a more traditionally "objective stance"', observing how previous fan scholars 'with little direct knowledge or emotional investment within the fan community' projected their 'personal fears, anxieties, and fantasies about the dangers of mass culture' onto fandom (6). Similarly, Akala writes that:

> I find the whole idea that we can transcend our experiences; and take a totally unbiased look at the world to be totally ridiculous, yet that's what many historians and academics claim to do. We are all influenced by what we are exposed to and experience; the best that we can hope for is to try and be as fair as possible from within the bias inherent in existence. The personal is the political, and this book is an attempt to give a personal face to the forces that you will often hear me speak of, if you hear me speak at all (Akala 22).

Hellekson and Busse state that 'it is remarkable that scholars thought that they had to explain their stance in relation to the text, just as it is remarkable that someone could present herself as a disinterested outsider looking in, without affecting the community she engages' (Hellekson and Busse 132), but this simplicity does not reflect how race scholars must often position themselves in relation to other fans. Elizabeth Hornsby for example makes the argument that even when acting from as neutral a position as she could while conducting her research on race in the *Sleepy Hollow* fandom,

> Several times fans assumed that because I am a Black female, I aligned myself with certain ideologies within the fandom. I worked incredibly hard to maintain a neutral presence online to avoid any perception of bias; however, for some fans, the color of my skin automatically caused me to seem biased. […] Even though I managed my online presence in the Sleepy Hollow fandom to not specifically align with any faction within it, I still encountered resistance and hesitancy because of my race (Hornsby 28).

As a Black woman, Hornsby encountered bias in her participants who assumed that because of her race and gender, she could not be a neutral researcher. If Hornsby had been a white woman, even if she did carry bias into her research, I would argue her participants would not have made the same assumptions and would have treated Hornsby as having taken rigorous steps not to influence her study. 'This is not a concern exclusive to fan studies', Wanzo argues, 'people who work in identity studies have arguably been most frequently attacked with claims of bias and "unscholarly" approaches' (Wanzo 3.6). My status as someone who is British East Asian and transgender are factors I cannot 'mask' to appear more 'objective'; unless I were to create a false persona who did not use the pronouns

they/them and asked a white proxy to 'be me' on camera, the same assumptions made about Hornsby's impartiality might also be made about my research.

Tooth Murphy continues that standard conversations about power, namely the asymmetry between interviewer and interviewee, 'overwhelmingly assume a linear, hierarchical relationship' where the interviewer exploits the interviewee (Tooth Murphy 3), when instead we can examine the potential of conversation when both members are from a minority community formed in response to discrimination and oppression (*ibid* 5). Tooth Murphy argues that with 'insider status', an interviewer's deliberate openness to give their own identit(ies) and self can be influential in 'aiding in establishing rapport, building trust, and, as a result, eliciting in-depth and richly textured interview responses' (*ibid* 7). Indeed, I found that there was both interest and renewed comfort on the side of participants who felt as if they could ask questions of me in return. As H Howitt argues in *How We Fuck and Unfuck the World*, trans researchers and subjects benefit when intimacy is used as method because 'connection creates the conditions necessary for knowledge sharing'. In refusing the separation of the research from the body and the context the research was produced in, Howitt states that researchers can see 'love' as an absolute necessity to conducting research because it is synonymous with dialogue. I thus began each interview with my camera on and by introducing my name with my pronouns: "My name is Nemo Martin, I use they/them pronouns", but not by announcing my racial identity, allowing this to come up as necessary. There is no clear way to standardise this sharing of self, and so this changed depending on the needs shown by my interviewees. For example, when Chris [any/all pronouns, South African Coloured] and I compared Hugo's apparent orientalism in reference to Chinese farmworkers (V,2,i,1030) with the Dutch colonial project that stated Chinese workers were

"efficient, industrious gardeners" (Jan van Riebeeck qtd in Harris 79), Chris raised that as a

South African Coloured person, their family history is mixed:

> there's also a portion of what they call in South Africa "Malay", which is people from
>
> Indonesia, Malaysia, Southeast Asia who were taken over as… slaves during the
>
> Dutch colonial process, but uh, so Malay, Zulu and Irish is the main known mix

Chris mentioned in the interview both the anti-Black and anti-Asian racism they

encountered only *after* stating hir family history as if to legitimise their own position within

typically binary racial models. I had already explained my previous (though basic) knowledge

of the history of South African Coloured people (to Chris's audible astonishment and clear

pleasure at not having to start with a defence of the use of the term 'Coloured' in this

context), but he remained aware that the interview would be used in this thesis and in the

podcast, perhaps encountering those with less knowledge than myself, and so continued to

explain herself throughout. This desire to situate themself in the conversation placed Chris

in a vulnerable position, and so both in solidarity and in thanks I then stated my own

position as a British-Japanese person. We then had a conversation in which Chris asked me

questions about my discomfort participating in Western fandoms of Asian properties. I

briefly considered throwing aside the question as irrelevant to the interview, but also

recognised, as both Howitt and Tooth Murphy argued, that by leveraging insider status, an

interviewer must also give of themselves, fostering the reciprocity vital to 'foster intimacy

and greatly enhance the outcome' (Tooth Murphy 7-8). Chris mentioned at the end of the

interview, unprompted: "you've been really pleasant to be interviewed by! […] you've asked

questions in the right way." Whether or not this openness on my part to disclose my

identities and foster intimacy was part of the pleasantness, my insider position collaborated

with my informal, open question style to create a safe space for discussion of racial identity that felt held, structured and judgement free.

Despite (or perhaps because of) this generally positive reaction to reciprocity, I recognised too late that two participants seemed to prefer an interviewer with 'outsider status', perhaps because that distance lends the interview the sense of importance. As Tooth Murphy remembered of her own research: 'Amidst a community who have fought long and hard to be heard […] the university paperwork and recording equipment I brought with me were welcomed as trappings that granted our encounter, and therefore their stories, legitimacy' (22). One participant, with whom I shared the most outward similarity, responded with the least enthusiasm or interest in our shared identities as non-binary, mixed-race white and Japanese people in the diaspora, and my excited statement that we were the "same" met a rather polite laugh and a simple "nice." I therefore adopted a slightly more official tone of voice, asking my questions as written rather than jumping around or following a more tangential and interviewee-guided route that I used for participants like Chris and Gabe. Similarly, despite their own initial creation of a bond between us by introducing themself as "also [using] they/them", the "also" in reference to my pronouns, one participant held themself at a professional distance for the majority of our interview. This participant did however talk explicitly throughout their interview about their hesitance at participating in fandom activity because of social anxiety. Their hesitancies may therefore not have been a response to my insider/outsider status but instead anxiety at being in an unfamiliar situation in combination with particularly shy personalities.

RACIAL FORMULATION

I had anticipated that asking participants for their racial identity would not be simple in many cases, and so in the screener survey, under the category of race I qualified:

> I will be conducting interviews with people who consider themselves racialised as non-white i.e. a person of colour / BIPOC / BAMER[43] / mixed-race / biracial / a person from the global majority. I am not looking for people of any specific ethnicity, hence the non-specific groupings and terms (Appendix 4).

I chose to list a non-exhaustive but fairly large selection of non-specific groupings to flag a level of understanding on my own end that racial identity is not simple, and that I was keen to talk to everyone who self-identified as non-white. Despite this, I still received some hesitancy in the open-answer to the survey: 'I am a very white passing mixed race person so tbh I'm not sure how helpful I will be' [sic], as well as kick-back to my terminology despite the list: 'I don't like to use the term "POC" to describe myself, but I'm not white.' This assertion reflects the opinions of some people who do not feel comfortable with generic groupings, as demonstrated by the #BAMEOver campaign, whose slogan is 'Nobody wants to be reduced to an acronym. Especially an acronym that is inaccurate' (*inc. arts* "A Statement for the UK"). In the interview questions I added:

> I have asked [for your race and gender identity] because a) grouped terms like 'person of colour', 'BAME' and 'transgender' are restrictive and do not accurately reflect the lived experiences of different racial or gender identities who navigate the

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[43] BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, Person Of Colour) is the US-American equivalent to the more UK-focused BAMER (Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic, Refugee), which I included because I was aware there is a fairly sizeable US-American population in the fandom.

world differently, and b) so that I am not misconstruing the experiences of one as the opinions of all. This is an optional question and can be answered with as much or as little information as you would be comfortable with.

I also noted in these interviews that while a participant was free to mask their name and pronouns with a fake identity and could opt to not answer the question, I would appreciate if participants did not fictionalise their racial and gender identities. I have no way to verify that participants told the truth, but I have no reason to believe that any participant lied.

Some people, like Karla, answered the initial question ("how do you define your racial identity") with "I am just a person of colour" only to specify, later in the interview, that she was a "Mexican woman". Sugar stated that she is "Black, but not African American." Gabe stated that he is "Latin American, I am Colombian, specifically, and… yeah. That's about it. I've lived here my whole life, and I am still living here, so… yes." Ivanna did not give me a simple, editable soundbite of their identity, answering the question by giving me context on their positionality as one of many Mexicans who are "mixed-race with Indigenous and Spanish colonisers", and the appropriateness of their calling themself "actually Indigenous" [00:00:42]. Aware that this answer would not fit into a neat box, I went on to prompt them to give me something to essentialise:

if you had to put that into words would you say "Mexican American"? "Latinx?" or would you just say "complicated"?

Like when available, I do say Mexican-American, or Latinx, Hispanic, but that is usually an ethnicity and not considered race, here [in the USA]. [00:02:10]

With hindsight, this refusal to allow Ivanna's first answer reveals my own use of race in this context not as a flexible, ever-changing thing as I will go on to argue it is, but as a solid, *biological* one, which I regret pushing for to achieve a literal box-ticking ability.

All three participants with Latin American heritage (Gabe, Karla, Ivanna) made reference to this anxiety as to the position their skin colour does/does not grant them as people from a colonised country with high proportions of mixed-race Indigenous-Colonizer heritage. As someone with outsider status in this regard, I asked for this to be explained to me each time. While the three did not necessarily disagree with one another, their different answers serve to illustrate how these complicated and multitudinous experiences of race cannot be generalised, especially without considering the additional intersections of colourism, class, geographic position, immigration status and other contextual relationships. We discussed the insidious nature of who was termed 'white passing', issues around people with Latin American heritage in the diaspora talking 'for' and 'about' being Latin American, and the complicated nature of what it means to be 'somewhat brown' versus being seen as 'Indigenous'. I do not want to situate these participants as being 'opposed' to one another because I do not believe that they raised these points in our interviews to cause other participants (or readers) harm, but include references to these differences to show the complexity of understanding what 'race' means to so many individuals, especially for those who operate within what we might otherwise see as being from the 'same' ethnic/cultural brackets.

While 'insider status' as a fellow fan of colour granted me access to opinions these participants might not have gifted to other researchers, I was also aware that race is not a universal experience. As Tooth Murphy recalled:

I was touched and affected by their stories of loss and suffering. But I was not, and

never would be, one of their number. Their tragedy, on such an immense scale, was

tellable but not knowable. This group are bound together by the grief that I could

hear but not share (23).

Gabe and I could bond over our racial-gender combination similarities, but I could only listen

as he recounted how close he and his friends have come to being disappeared by the police

because of his proximity to protest (Hu and Pozzebon, *CNN*). Race is not simply about

inherited skin colour and facial features, but about individual situation, history,

engagement, culture, context and even self-awareness, and this is something I have become

increasingly aware of as I summarise participant identities in snappy [gender, race]

descriptors.

THE DEFINITION OF SILENCE

One hurdle I had not expected before conducting these interviews was the significant

resistance participants had against an idea of 'selling out' the fandom for what was

perceived to be personal instances of hurt. While I had expected fear of backlash from

interviewees who spoke about racism, there was a much more pervasive fear amongst

almost all participants that if they prioritised themselves above the community, they would

be doing more harm than good. Hart calls the fluidity and temporality of tumblr (as opposed

to 'one rigid, fixed online community') a 'post-subcultural mode of belonging' in which

Tumblr users are a neo-tribe: 'ambient, dynamic and temporary alliances centred on affect

and style, rather than ideology or geography' (Hart 208). Because fandom is a neo-tribal

community, while the fan may be interacting with others online, they are typically alone in a

physical space, and might only converse about their fan activities with other fans in the

same fandom. Noncommunal behaviour in the fan space is 'read negatively, as a violation of

the social contract that binds fans together' (Jenkins 282), and as Rankine observes, to

'create discomfort by pointing out facts is seen as socially unacceptable (178). Because of a

fear of breaking cohesion and thus banished for speaking out, and without a place to air

public grievances that is safely moderated,[44] many of the participants I interviewed stated

that they felt completely alone as a fan of colour in the fandom. Because of this isolation,

fans of colour believed racist instances did not feel like institutional failings but criticisms of

their own personal faults. McIntosh, listing ways in which white privilege benefits her, says 'I

can go home from most meetings of organizations I belong to feeling somewhat tied in,

rather than isolated, out-of-place, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance or feared' (qtd.

in Rankine 34). Unlike McIntosh, several participants had a hard time distinguishing

between what constituted racism and what was 'a valid criticism' of either their person or

their art ('If my day, week, or year is going badly, I need not ask of each negative episode or

situation whether it had racial overtones' (*ibid*)). This anxiety is the deeper root of fandom

racism I had not expected to encounter. While I had been prepared to talk about colourism

or ethnic fetishes, I did not anticipate unearthing how this fandom has put forth a narrative

that forces its participants to question their realities, often with great distress. As Karla

[Mexican, she/her] stated:

> It took me years to find enough confidence to do cosplay because I did not see
>
> people that look like me online and didn't want to look ridiculous or like I didn't

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[44] There are fan confessional blogs in which anonymous fans can post confessions through proxy, but this does not constitute a safe space, as the same anonymity can be extended to those who disagree, and there is no facilitator to moderate any conversations had about the confessions.

belong. [...] I got it in my mind that only conventionally attractive people were allowed to do cosplay and since I'm not white and skinny mine wouldn't look good. [Karla]

Here, Karla recognises that the conventions of 'attractive' within fandom are bound with race and body type, and Karla does not fit. Kat [Filipino, she/her] echoed a similar sentiment when talking about writing fanfiction:

when I tried to write in that way that's very grounded and rooted [in Filipino culture], it doesn't seem to click... It's like, is it because I'm Asian? Is because of my writing? Or it's because it's not what people are looking for [Kat 01:04:50]

It was somewhat surprising to discover how even in this theoretically free space where any imagined universe is possible, there are still unwritten constraints about racial representation. Fan spaces are deemed as escapist, where fans congregate to separate real-world stresses from fannish joy (Hellekson and Busse 80, Jenkins xi, Penley 177). Queer white fannish is sacrosanct in fandom because, at least here, white queerness is perceived as universal and as such it is the norm against which other identities are now othered: for many people, tumblr operates as a safe space in which 'desires, intimate feelings, and sexualities can be practised or negotiated, free from potential stigma or prejudice' (Hart 209). Unlike much of the outside world, white queerness is seen to be relatively 'apolitical' in fan spaces, and so to prod or to question the space is seen to bring unnecessary aggression to what *should* be an escapist fantasy land designed to rid the fan of the daily homophobic and transphobic abuses they may face. But as Boeckner, Flegel and Leggatt argue, the 'implicit assumption' made by this mindset is that '"people" are white, and that [racial] representation is a burden to their sensibilities' (190). Although 'one might assume

that a fandom identity takes the ultimately salient position in fandom space', especially in online fandom dedicated to a particular fandom, Gatson and Reid argue that the creation of these spaces normalizes and makes generic assumptions of race, class, gender and sexuality, which puts pressure on those outside of these assumptions not to speak (4.1). There is little care that a queer fan of colour might experience *both* queerphobia and racism and wish to make *their* escapist dreamland free from their daily abuses, because the now-normalized white queer female fan has achieved (an admittedly hard won) freedom as the generic 'fan' and does not wish to disrupt this by having to wade into racial politics. Despite being allegedly apart from outer off-line society, fandom still exists within the framework of a white supremacist world *and* it refuses to acknowledge this, which only aggravates the issues. The fan of colour thus suffers as Rankine does: 'It's hard to exist and also accept my lack of existence' (41).

The 'well-meaning' aspect of allyship is often also seen to trump any harm done in the name of this same allyship, until this 'allyship' becomes part of the upholding of bigotry they had allegedly been fighting to stop. This is recognised when some participants of my interviews say with sarcasm that a fan of *LM* cannot, by definition, be racist, because the characters that white writers are portraying are stated to be 'anti-racist':

Les Amis are activists campaigning and laying down their lives for a better world – [...] people tend to absorb that, [...] they want to be in line with Les Amis in a modern setting. They want to be... social justice-y [...] but often honestly [...] it's a lot of teenagers and early college students – so sometimes their understanding of what means to involve one's self in activism in that way can be quite shallow [Chris 01:12:50]

I think the way Les Mis fans see [fandom] as a space that is dedicated to? focused

on? issues of social justice makes it even whiter, because then we lose any sort of

acknowledgment or critique of the ways Les Mis [does] have a lot of racism in it. […]

a lot of people will call themselves leftists and read, like, the political theory […] of

the time [and yet] no one says the race word. [Solomon 2:17:44]

Chris and Solomon vocalise the complexity of existing within a fandom space where their fellow white fans are, *theoretically*, on the 'right' side, being as they are Liberal, and how that often makes these white fans feel as if they are absolved from turning their anti-racism attentions inwards. In latching on to characters and theories where the *other* is bad, supplementing this with readings on social justice and online activism, the queer white *LM* fandom citizen makes themself invisible to criticism and thus prevents further discussion through a lack of self-awareness. Tone policing is critical here, in which fans regulate what is considered the 'correct' tone that 'can or should be taken when noting the existence of racist language, imagery, or characterizations' (Gatson and Reid 3.2). Some fans of colour like @Oyceter begin their journey in fandom discourse believing other fans of colour are 'too mean and snarky' before realising that this is 'self-protection against the ignorance and abuse that comes up when white people are asked to confront their racism' (qtd. in TWC Editor "Pattern Recognition). When fandom space is deemed special, a border has been created. To enter is to decide to obey the laws of the land, and when the laws state that whiteness in fandom is not to be questioned, fans of colour risk social segregation or deportation for not obeying these rules. Refusal to even have the conversation about racism is a privilege, because it is a privilege not having to dismantle racist structures in order to exist peacefully. As Wildman observes:

The definition of silence is fairly self-evident, yet very important in the maintenance

of systems of power. Silence is the lack of sound and voice. […] Silence may also arise

from oppression or fear. Whatever the reason for silence, its presence means the

absence of verbal criticism. What we do not say, what we do not talk about,

maintains the status quo (Wildman 885).

When on both sides there is silence: silence from the white queer fan who wants to protect

their space and silence from the fan of colour who fears their ostracization from a space

they desire to feel peace in, there is a status quo, and that is the normalisation of white

supremacy. In this space, white queer people hold the power to oppress, and to not

acknowledge this is to privilege their safety, thus risking their new-found privilege. I thus

faced an dilemma when probing these fans of colour. While I felt this work would benefit

from evidence either in the form of direct accounts of events or links to specific works, as

well as explicitly stating how keeping silent on these incidents would keep the white

supremacy afloat, I did not wish to gain this at the expense of the participant's online safety

and/or comfort. As Pande and Moitra point out, fans of colour must often choose between

participating in universal fannish joy 'or risk being labeled as people who bring drama into

fandom spaces' by raising issues of racism or attempting to question white supremacy in

fanworks (Pande and Moitra 156). While many participants could list moments with tangible

evidence off the top of their heads, referring to art or fanfiction that had been racist, few

participants opted to provide a link to said works, nor did any participant offer usernames of

people who had acted discriminately towards them. I confirmed with each participant as to

whether they wished to retract any mention of any incident that could have linked them to

their real or fandom identity. All incidents included are thus only what have been freely

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volunteered, and so do not represent the full extent of racial and gender-based discrimination experienced in the *LM* fandom.

It can become murky to discuss fan practise when fan spaces are averse to being content-policed. This is often for good reason: many are rightly aware that queer and trans spaces are amongst the first to be censored when regulation is enforced. I do not, however, believe that criticisms of white supremacist thought counts toward enforcing online purity culture. This is not an argument to regulate online fan spaces but to vocalise how, despite its liberal, social-justice leaning political bent, the *LM* fandom is not immune to the pervasive and insidious history of racial tropes in fiction and in art. Fan creators who support Black Lives Matter and Stop Asian Hate, who would reblog informational posts about Islamophobia in France and any other manner of race-related hate-crime also create racist fanworks, and this has had the effect of creating feelings of discomfort, trauma and, crucially, inevitability in fans of colour.

RACISM IN THE LES MIS FANDOM

I was surprised, and slightly bemused, by the assurance by almost every participant I interviewed that they had never experienced racism within the *LM* fandom, only for them to then go on to describe several occurrences of race-inspired 'discomfort'. When prompted on this disparity, participants compared their experiences in the *LM* fandom to other, often larger, fandoms where the treatment of race is not so subtle, or 'woke-minded'. As Solomon summarised:

I've been lucky to receive no, like, direct, like, you know, "go back to your country,

foreigner!" type of racism from people in the [*Les Mis*] fandom. You know, like, we

got our issues, but we're not like… I think generally people are not *that* type of [...]

overtly racist. It's all subtle and subtextual when we do it. [Solomon 1:46:17]

While Solomon tactfully uses the pronoun 'we' when describing the fandom, likely in an

attempt to diffuse potential backlash, it is notable that Solomon specifically says that they

feel "lucky" to not have experienced "overt" racism, directly after describing to me a time

where they had received race-based anonymous hate mail from a *LM* fan. There was a

baseline level of racism that all interviewees felt was standard while participating in fandom,

and thus *LM* succeeded in not being 'racist' because it carried less of the hallmarks of card-

carrying KKK, capital-R-Racism they had otherwise experienced. Several participants raised

the point that this 'subtextual' racism was a far-cry from the often-physical racial violence

they experienced in real life. As Karla stated:

online I'm [talking about racism such as] microaggressions and this and that, and

how to properly address people, and all that, and in real life I'm like "please don't kill

me! Like please let's not kill Indigenous people!" Like, oh yeah, this is terrible, the

news are so bad, I'm scared to go outside of my house [sic] [Karla 00:51:43]

Though fandom racism upset and angered fans of colour, this frustration was seen as

secondary to their other lived experiences. Gabe, for instance, humorously noted that he in

fact craves reading white, westernised fics that depict protest-culture as being fluffy,

because for him it imagines a world unlike his own, where protest is non-violent and

without fear of death. He talked explicitly about regularly witnessing the Esmad (the Anti-

Riot Mobile Squad) on his campus, laughing as he imitated the sound of gunfire:

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I started hearing this Ta! Ta! Ta! (*he clicks his fingers*), like this really loud sounds and I was like "oh man what's going on?" and then "oh, it's Thursday! Of course!" […] "oh hey that's … is that tear gas? Oh shit, I have to move (*laughs*)" [Gabe 00:14:00]

Gabe stated that he re-visits the fanfiction trope of 'the protest goes wrong' because "you just kind of… see the difference between what a protest in the US looks like and what a protest [in Colombia] looks like." This world of an imagined race-based protest that can *end successfully* gives him a sense of comfort that local protest does not. In a similar vein, Ossama Abdel-Fattah Rezk, an Egyptian journalist, insisted that the 2012 film's depiction of revolution 'may not have been fully realistic or politically contextualized but that it remained inspirational in its awareness that freedom is an ongoing cause rather than a simply obtained objective' (Stephens 2016a 201). Thus, when asked whether he had experienced racism within the fandom, Gabe's scale of reference was significantly wider than online hate mail.

As well as this separation between online and real-life racism, participants like Chris note that they likely have not received direct racist attacks because they do not post pictures of themself regularly to their fandom blog, existing semi-anonymously with only minimal demographic information available for those looking to identify them. Chris mentions how many (often younger) fans will now create a carrd [sic] or a linktree (a one-page personal profile or landing page), where there is an expectation to lay out your personal information for others to see,[45] but that fandom happens predominantly on

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[45] These originally started as a way for people to note their triggers (so that their friends could avoid triggering them) or to note age, particularly people under 18 who did not wish for those over 18 to interact with them, or 18+ blogs noting that their page was not suitable for minors, but has since become the subject of debate. Some note that many minors are being asked to put identifying data on the internet precisely because it makes them more vulnerable to grooming and/or doxxing.

websites like tumblr where racial identity can rarely be guessed or assumed because most users do not have avatars that display their own image, nor do usernames reflect real names (Hart 208). These sites also encourage the 'online construction of personas', with a performativity that comes with joining a community identity (Hellekson and Busse 2). The majority of the participants I talked to came to the conclusion that because with tumblr (as with most social media sites), you curate your own experience by following people you are interested in, the people they currently followed were likely to be those that were anti-racist, or of colour themselves. Since most participants had spent nearly a decade in the fandom, there had likely been a process of selection (through following and unfollowing) until the users whose opinions they see regularly mirrored their own. This meant that several participants noted that while they themselves had not seen racism in their own circles, it probably did happen in majority-white, or more aggressive parts of the fandom they chose to remain apart from. This choice was not a particularly conscious one for most participants, and as Sugar joked, she had no idea that several of the people she followed for years were not white, until they posted selfies "and I was like 'oh! Okay! Now I See! We're on the same page, got you!'" [00:45:40]. Solomon, too, talked about a similar sense of pleasurable discovery in the few times where they had discovered the person they were talking to is a person of colour "and I'll be like, 'oh my god! There's more of us here!'" They describe the feeling as being similar to finding a person from your hometown out in the world, and that it is "*always* a surprise" [01:16:23]. While most participants couldn't say for sure that the fandom was predominantly white, most spoke of this feeling of "I just know", and as demonstrated above, most assumed that all other users but themselves were white until proven otherwise. Some attributed this to the fact that fanworks were full of persistent stereotypical tropes, and thus stated that they actively kept away from the biggest discord

servers out of a fear of experiencing or witnessing harassment and/or an unpleasurable treatment of race, which would thus taint the fandom experience. Kat said that she goes so far as to not "disclose that I'm Asian…", hiding her ethnicity to afford the comfort of not being a 'token' or 'ignored' [00:58:40]. Though online anonymity protected certain fans from a certain amount of direct racial hate, this does not mean that participants had not been made to feel intensely dysphoric by fanworks. Johnson states that historically,

> black people have been denied access to representations that depict their basic humanity without having to first make affordances to the white gaze. Instead, black people and black bodies have been occupied and utilized as objects for the procreation of white supremacy. There is no reason to suggest that, left to its own devices, fandom would do anything differently, particularly when we consider the ongoing primacy of slavery as a formative framework of blackness (2.2-3).

As one fan, Chris, recalls of the *LM* fandom:

> There was one – it was a kink meme work, so I don't know why I was surprised, but it was a [ER] work and Grantaire was Black, and that's why I started reading it, and it very quickly became apparent that it was a fetish work, where the fetish was his ethnicity, and it was… that was very distressing, just because it was... "oh his dark skin and his big, strong arms" and you know the very… what's that term – like Mandigo, is that the term? Like it's this whole, like, you know what I mean, like it's a porn category, you are seeing him as a sex object with a voice [Chris 01:22:00]

The first, third and fourth search results for 'Mandigo' bring up the 1975 film based on the 1957 novel, where 'Mandigo' means an enslaved Black male of the 'finest stock' for 'fighting

and breeding' (Bernardi 219). The rest of the results are various porn websites. This racial

fetishization, where the body of a big, dark-skinned Black man is written as pornographic for

the erotic pleasure of a white audience, is a form of racial violence enacted upon fans like

Chris who, in searching for racial representation ("that's why I started reading it"), was in

fact faced with a legacy of the slavesploitation genre ("that are obviously very distressing").

In a similar vein, fans of colour have come across 'sexual slavery' as a kink within the

fandom, most often between 'Two White Guys' (Fazekas 103). By romanticising the (white)

master (white) slave relationship, white fans can consume the slave narrative as a 'site of

pleasure', ignoring the presence of race and thus forgoing 'any attendant guilt or

acknowledgment of responsibility' of whiteness in the history of slavery (Fazekas 107). As

Fazekas has argued, 'the position of slave (and the intergenerational trauma that follows

from it) cannot be experienced by white authors and readers. Slavery AUs thus constitute a

form of historical appropriation and rely on a worldview that negates Blackness and equates

only whiteness with humanity' (Fazekas 105). Less popular but still present within the *LM*

fandom is the use of sexual slavery as a trope between a Black master and a white slave

(and, occasionally, the white master with the Black enslaved person). Unequal power

dynamics in a relationship are common in sexual fantasies, but fans of colour question who

it is that can desire such a setting for their erotic fiction. A fandom that was not majority-

white, the logic goes, would not create work that was so clearly catering to a white

audience.

Yee notes that the 'representation' of colonized peoples in nineteenth-century

French fiction 'inside the hegemonic world-view passes through the perilous process of

translation, or by the still more violent translational process of fictionalization', arguing that

many of these issues 'are closely reflected' today (Yee 2008, 6). We can see this sometimes

very literal process carried through into fandom, where it is common for bilingual users to criticise writers who are clearly monolingual/cultural. Nearly every participant I interviewed had a story that exemplified this, with Latin American characters exclaiming "*Mi abuelita's tamales*!", or "oh we're going to eat *la comida,* and we're using *el sombrero*," and "*mi casa es tu casa!*". Karla describes these as well-meaning but "off", and Gabe switched between laughing and uncomfortably groaning as he re-counted stories written by people with a non-Native tongue. The consensus between these fans was that they appreciated the thought but would have much preferred that the author had researched the language and culture before inserting naïve translations and stock phrases. As well as ham-fisted attempts at second languages, fans identified a pervasive whiteness that came from a distinct lack of certain elements of identity, namely any *positive* aspects of being a person of colour. Ivanna stated that they could not recall encountering "an actual in-depth description about the positive things that come within being… a brown person in the sense of culture?", noting that white writers "don't really know about the intricacies of existing within the culture […] all of the nuances of interaction and the celebration and the food, the places of origin and so on". Solomon talked about fics where characters had arcs about feeling out of place within the Amis because of their identity as a racial minority, but "to me seemed very clearly written by a white voice, or someone who […] didn't have experience with being ostracised for racial identity." Chinami felt unaffected by fandom portrayals of East Asian characters because they had yet to see a fanwork "dive into the experience of actually being East Asian […] it was more 'by the way this character's eating this particular food at lunch', and that's just kind of a throw-away". These fans identified that white writers will only engage with race when it is to give their characters plotlines that centre marginalisation and brutalisation, never celebration. Doing so only serves to further the idea that being non-

white is an inherently *negative* experience, and that characters of colour can only be identified when they are singled out by the racist 'other'.

Most of the fans of colour I interviewed stated that their number one source of dysphoria or discomfort in this fandom was the proliferation of Black Lives Matter protests as a trope-filled meet-cute backdrop for *LM* characters to fall in love. Fans described a "fanfiction in which cops beating up a Black child is the catalyst for Enjolras and Grantaire's relationship", or a "white blogger writing about Enjolras and Combeferre's illegitimate mixed-race child (adopted by Enjolras and Grantaire) and how that child would tragically have identity issues and feelings of unbelonging". As Solomon states:

> how tone deaf that is to have [Hugo's] characters appropriating [the BLM movement?] it's one thing to cope with... grief about injustice through fan work. I think it's another to try to, like gain fandom clout off of someone's like, brutal murder [01:05:52]

These instances, which for white writers can be written as thought-experiments, have real effect on fans of colour. Some fans, like Sugar, ignore the fics and move on: "I've not seen anything for Black Live- no that's not true, I've seen it but I haven't read it. Yeah because I was like 'that's dumb, why would I want to.' Like, no." Several termed this as a *personal* experience of racism in the fandom, even though (or perhaps especially because) this *setting* would, in itself, present as being anti-racist. Others, like Ivanna pointed out that their primary reason to partake in fandom is escapism, and while it would 'probably be nice' to read a character with a similar background to themself,

> I also don't know if it would hit too close to home, [...] "oh that's a little bit too much reality for me!" [...] I don't want to be sad, so I'm just going to avoid it. Like I already

know that it's there, I don't need you to write me an essay about how hard it is to be a brown person, like trust me, I already know [01:04:50].

Even when I prodded Ivanna in the direction of reading a fic that was about the *joys* of being a first-generation Mexican American, they kept returning to this idea of 'difficulty', stating that they would rather avoid a fic that mentions a Mexican character altogether to minimise the risk that it "is a little bit too real because I am probably going to end up experiencing those same fears whenever I step out of the house." While Ivanna is adamant that they would like to see more racially diverse fanfics, anything close to their own identity carries the risk of triggering both memories of personal racial trauma and a spike in fear that it will happen to themself again. Wanzo, using Gerald Early's work on Black fandoms, notes how fan studies scholarship 'often references the complicated relationship fans have to texts that they know are deeply problematic', where even 'celebrations of positive representations can be haunted by specters that creators and consumers of black cultural production struggle to escape' (Wanzo 4.5-6). Because of historic and current treatment of race by society in the macro, and the fandom in the micro, there is little trust on the side of the fans of colour that white fans *could* write positive representations of characters of colour, and thus are on guard for 'stereotypical, grotesque representations and performances' (Wanzo 4.5).

I believe that there is an unsaid but deeper-seated sense of hurt that comes from racially insensitive fanworks than 'official' adaptations because the (white) creators of fanworks have closer status to the fans of colour. Fans of colour have expectations of predominantly white institutions like the BBC, or Hollywood, or the West End, and are sad but not surprised when productions are all-white and/or depict non-white race negatively.

When a white fan exhibits this same racism, this is perceived as preventable and, I would argue, something that fans of colour feel in some way accountable for – especially as fan artist 'create artworks to share with other fan friends' and not because of 'self-interested motivations of mainstream cultural production' (Jenkins 279). There is an awareness in fans of colour that the 'appropriation' of the Other's voice is not *just* a 'pernicious form of ventriloquism' but an often well-meaning (if flawed) 'attempt to write about cultural difference [as] an act of imaginative sympathy' (Yee 2008, 106). As Johnson argues, at best this means that:

> predominantly black fans will have to spend time and emotional labor in correcting
>
> those fans who are reproducing white supremacist logics without intending to. At
>
> worst, it leads to a violent participatory culture in which the images of the black
>
> body are used either as a justification to terrorize or as the terror itself (5.3).

While engaged viewers are now 'actively invited and courted by producers' (Hellekson and Busse 13), there is little a fan can do to prevent a large-scale production from being racist (especially after the adaptation is released), but fan communities are just that: a community (Jenkins 280). Fans of colour are thus placed in a position where changing a portrayal is technically achievable, but at the cost of their emotional labour and their potential loss of status/comfort in the community.

PART TWO: CHARACTER BY CHARACTER ANALYSIS

BLACK ENJOLRAS

I start this character-by-character analysis with the man most often perceived as a main

obsession within the fandom, Enjolras. Since his very conception, fans have identified so strongly with Enjolras to use his name as an alias during their work: in 1871 the co-founder of Anarcho-feminism Louise Michel signed her letters as 'Enjolras', exhibiting the character's pull as a figurehead of change (Robb 1998, 502). In the twenty-first century, *LM* fans rally against all-white TV show cast announcements and participate in digital or physical anti-racism protests, as seen in the drive in 2020 by a group called the Bishop Myriel Fundraiser to sell fanart to raise money to donate to charities that provided financial relief for families of victims of police brutality, and to fundraisers bailing out those who had been jailed throughout BLM protests. Penly compares the fan's inclusion of social issues within their fanworks to the 'same impulse' of female nineteenth-century popular novelists who included 'opinions on temperance and slavery', 'rural-urban tensions and the class divisions in American society' in their works, transforming 'the public sphere by imaginatively demonstrating how it could be improved through making it more answerable to women's interests' (Penly 182). This fandom mentality to associate fan activity with real injustice is good-natured but occasionally not well thought out. One post from June 2020 parodies what has now become a common form of remembering the people who have been killed by police: a black background with white text listing the names of the deceased, but in this case the dead are the names of the Amis. In the caption, the user encourages their followers to 'keep up the spirit' of the revolutionaries this barricade day[46] by supporting the 'blm cause', pointing them to the "Ways you can help" BLM carrd (Nico).[47] Another user wrote in a post:

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[46] There is an uptick in activity on June 6th every year, which is what is referred to as 'Barricade Day' and often sees old fans' re-entry to fandom spaces, like a day of remembrance. Users typically mourn Les Amis, who died upon the barricade in the novel on this date, often by posting artwork that centres the image of the barricade, Enjolras holding the red flag, and the liberal use of blood.

[47] A directory that points users towards petitions, resources, maps of protests and a donation website.

> I just want to be in a protest where we all sing "Do you hear the people sing" from
>
> les mis. Like, c'mon, that would be awesome. / (Also, this is such a weird fucking
>
> thing to think about lmao but goddamn it this would be so fucking cool)

This user has some awareness that this post is controversial, hence the aside in parenthesis, but in comments in the post, they do not retract their statement despite criticisms. This appropriation of the aesthetics of what is an incredibly violent and traumatising continuation of racism towards Black people has been criticised in posts by people like user @slnnohan:

> are you having fun because you managed to repackage your discomfort into
>
> something easy to fictionalize? / and you're making memes and jokes about the real
>
> life deaths of people? that's what their lives were to you? / you show you really
>
> don't give a fuck. you just want those likes and reblogs. this is a trend to you and you
>
> don't want to confront how uncomfortable everything makes you.

As part of this drive to support BLM in 2020, some fans recognised that in associating the Amis with Black Lives Matter protests, it is not in good form to have a white man leading the charge in their depictions as this falls into the trope of a whitewashing of protests.[48] Fans thus typically opt to 'racebend' Hugo's characters, a term originally devised to protest against the whitewashed casting of the live-action adaptation of the animated show *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, where a show with majority-Asian and Indigenous-inspired characters

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[48] Most recent examples of this include the insertion of a white protagonist into the film *Stonewall* that erases the leadership of trans and lesbian women of colour Marsha P. Johnson, Sylbia River and Stormé DeLarverie (O'Hara, *Daily Dot*), or white cis filmmaker David France's alleged stealing of research from Black trans woman Reina Gossett (Valens, *Daily Dot*).

was cast as majority-white. The term racebending is now used to refer to white characters who have been made non-white, where this art 'often retains some physical resemblance to the character as originally described or portrayed' (Nadkarni and Sivarajan 122). Drives like Racebending Revenge, which went live in 2010, asked fans to re-write 'one or more white characters in the fandom(s) of your choice as chromatic/non-white/PoC […] with some acknowledgement of how the racial difference would make a difference to the story being told' (@Racebending Revenge). One comic by Glockgal, in which the demon-hunting protagonists of *Supernatural* are made into brown men, ends 'fast—too fast—as they are pulled over, arrested, and eventually deported', a commentary on how gun-slinging road trip fantasies are not 'available to everyone' (Coppa 207-8).

Thus was born an Enjolras with brown skin, thick lips, a wide nose, low brow and bleached-blonde hair, sometimes with dreads or twists but often flowing and slightly wavy. In every case from my study of ten artists, Enjolras begins his life in the artist's headcanon as a pale white man.[49] The notable hiatuses between user 6 and 8's time in the fandom aligns with their sudden switch to a non-white Enjolras, both returning within six months of each other in late-2017/mid-2018 with a new, Black headcanon. User4 barely draws Enjolras, but in all depictions he is white. User 5 only had one very early work, which was white, and all of User9's were white. In seven out of ten cases, there is a moment, typically within the last quarter of the artist's career, where Enjolras becomes Black. Given the political climate of

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[49] User1's 28th Enjolras is ethnically ambiguous, intermittently switching between brown and white until their 93rd work, where he is Black, and then for the following 130 works is either East Asian or Black. User2's 93rd Enjolras is Black, but their others following this are white. User3's 88th work is brown, but this is an art swap (where two users colour one another's line works, so is an anomaly). User6's 57th Enjolras is brown, and it is the first (and last) after a three-year hiatus. User7's 103rd and 108th Enjolras are Black. User8's 46th Enjolras is Black, the first (and last) after a year's hiatus. User10 has several ambiguously-brown Enjolras through their career, but their 103rd and 159th works are arguably the only two that depict him as being non-white, with only two more depictions after (one white, one ambiguous).

liberal, social justice-focused spaces during this period, it seems clear that fanartists were confronted with imagery of previously non-platformed contemporary Black activists, who served as direct inspiration for these fanworks. Yet despite this latter-day turn towards racialisation, Enjolras is overwhelmingly depicted as a non-Black person of colour.[50] 133/540 Enjolras were of colour, with 43 ambiguously ethnic Enjolras, a category created when his skin was brown but his features were 'standard', as if a white Enjolras had been colour-picked to be darker-skinned. The highest ratio was User1 at just under 30% portrayals of Enjolras as Black, but they were also the only user to begin posting in 2017, rather than the much earlier 2012-14 starts every other user had, and thus had the benefit of beginning after the ubiquity of the 2012 film boom. In a time where racialised communities are having frequent and ongoing conversations about colourism and about the privileging of light-skinned Black people in media and in beauty standards over dark-skinned Black people, many *LM* fans continue to privilege an Enjolras of colour who is not explicitly Black, often depicting him as ambiguously mixed-race. Enjolras is canonically described as being 'angelically beautiful' (III,4,i,536), and when he is almost exclusively white or an ambiguously light-skinned person of colour, this promotes the idea that to be considered angelic and beautiful is to have light skin and Eurocentric features. Considering how Christian imagery is historically whitewashed, depicting people with Middle Eastern and Northern African heritage as white Europeans, it is perhaps unsurprising that fans have absorbed Hugo's descriptions without much change. It could of course be argued that Hugo

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[50] Out of 181 portrayals, User1 depicted Enjolras as Black 54 times, East or Southeast Asian 26 times, an ambiguous ethnicity 18 times and as white 84 times. User2 had 2/24 Black Enjolras. User3 had 6 Enjolras of colour but 0/83 were Black. User4 had 0/14 and User5 had 0/1. User6 had 3 ambiguous and 1 Black Enjolras/32. User7 had 6/66 Black Enjolras. User8 had 1/35. User9 had 0/36. User10 had 16 ambiguously ethnic Enjolras, but 0/68 were explicitly Black.

has been more prescriptive with his descriptions of Enjolras than many other characters, repeatedly describing his blond hair and pale skin. However, as I will discuss later, at no point is Bossuet described as a Black man, and yet he is overwhelming portrayed as being so, with almost no exception. It is far more agreeable for fans to portray a clumsy, down-on-his luck side-character as being Black than it is to make the angelically beautiful leader Black. This is in line with our societal history of racist caricatures of Black men, and it would be disingenuous to pretend that this mapping of light skin and white features on a powerful, beautiful angel and dark skin and Black features on an incompetent fool is not racially motivated. This is of especial importance because, as Bellos notes, Enjolras is the character who sets out how France can move towards the future and eradicate poverty with science and technology:

> The worse side, [Enjolras] cannot imagine. He's part of it already. The blond hair, fair skin and fine profile that Hugo gives him […], his exclusive devotion to a political cause, the charisma he exercises over others more sensible than he is, his gifts for public speaking and for military action and his unshakeable faith in the purifying virtue of violence speak to us now of the kind of men who turned the twentieth century not into utopia but into sheer hell (Bellos 201).

While it could be argued that fan depictions do not have malicious intentions, as artist Ravi Teixeira concludes in their 2018 zine entitled 'The Case For Black Enjolras':

> look, white people, I get it. / It feels nice to imagine that your men could make a difference. White Enjolras is just a character for you, like Harry Potter or Bilbo Baggins. Just a fantasy. / He feels comfortable to you (Teixeira 31-2).

Teixeira points here to the active decision to portray Enjolras as a white person because that depiction gives positive affirmations to a white viewer. A white man with Aryan beauty on the progressive side of history is a positive depiction of whiteness in conversations where whiteness is typically referred to as an oppressive force. Doubling down on the angel of the barricades being white absolves the viewer of their own white guilt: if white Enjolras can be seen as the symbol of anti-racism, so too can the white fan. The creation of a *good* white (or non-Black) leader feeds two narratives. The first being the white saviour trope, in which a cause or project can only be successful when helmed by a white leader. The other Amis may be Black, but their cause would never succeed without a white man at the helm. This runs into the second, which attempts to absolve queer white people from addressing their racism, making a false equivalence between sharing marginalisation and sharing lived experience. White queer people are as capable as white heteronormative people of racism, but in depicting a queer white person as the posterchild of progress, the white queer fan can forge a comfortable space in which they not only do not have to address their racism, but can believe themselves absolved of it through their proximity to Enjolras' privileged status.

UGLY DISGUSTING BABY SON

In work number User7-94, the artist has been sent a request prompt, a follower of the artist requesting that User7 draw 'ugly Grantaire'. Hugo describes Grantaire as being 'unnaturally ugly' (III,4,i,543) ['Il était laid démesurément' (LM 580)], and this is often cited throughout fandom as a quality that marks him as different, especially at odds with his foil, Enjolras. There is an evident thirst in the fandom for a Grantaire who is actively ugly rather than the portrayals of him as the young, scruffy, actor-handsome man he typically is on screen. In the

art User7 provides, Grantaire has tan, orange-toned skin mottled with acne and shaded with red as if to display an uneven skin pigmentation or a rash. He has an angular face with a prominent brow and high cheekbones, and it is dominated by a large aquiline nose. He has thin, hooded, red-rimmed brown eyes. He has two old scars across the bridge of his nose and under his left eye. He has a lopsided smirk that reveals his gums, thick, dark eyebrows, and a patchy, uneven beard with no moustache. His hair is an ashy brown and is lightly curly. Instead of a flower-crown, white flowers erupt from his hair as if he has just woken up from a nap in a flowerbed. The only comment User7 writes in the tags is "is that okay?", as if expecting to receive a backlash to their portrayal. In response to the art, some embrace what is deemed ugly with comments like: "this is really important oh my god, look at him, look at his nose and un-clear skin, look at him and just cry with me over ugly R, this is so amazing", "why is it so hard to find actually ugly grantaire stuff, all y'all making him cute all the time […] I approve the heck out of this", "ugly grantaire is so important", "he's even uglier than I imagined him in my head geez, and he's perfect", one even going on an enthusiastic rant in caps lock: "LOOK AT MY UGLY DISGUSTING BABY SON, GROSS JERK BABY". Others rail against his being deemed ugly: "[he] isn't that ugly though ;A; I never find anyone unattractive", "no Grantaire is an ugly Grantaire", "he's cute I'm going to kiss him" "still beautiful bye", "::heart eyes::". While there is some defence of the character in fans who claim there is no such thing as an 'ugly Grantaire', and that this big-nosed, pock-marked, smirking illustration is 'still beautiful', there is no fan in this comment section who questions why these traits are the ones that have been chosen to signify 'ugly'. The user who claims this portrayal is "really important" might be suggesting through their phrasing that while society deems these traits as 'ugly', the character's clear humour and self-affirming smirk create the sense that features society deems undesirable do not make

Grantaire *feel* ugly, thus creating a positive visual representation for a fan (potentially the user themself), who might see themself in the image. This is 'important', this user might be suggesting, because societal beauty standards that categorise Grantaire and others with skin conditions and thick brows as 'ugly' do not diminish his attractiveness as a character.

This does, however, glance past the point where we have apparently acknowledged that these features, alone or in combination, are "UGLY DISGUSTING". If we considered this work along with many other portrayals of him in fandom, we could likely not pick this work out of the crowd as being the Ugly!Grantaire. He has a prominent, angular bone structure in his face, a feature recognisable in Benedict Cumberbatch, tumblr's favourite actor of 2013 ("Most Reblogged: Actors"), the strong wide jaw of third favourite Matt Smith, and the hooded eyes of fifth favourite Misha Collins. When we reach thirteenth and fourteenth favourites Darren Criss and Tyler Hoechlin we find tan skin and thick, dark eyebrows, which only leaves the smirk (barely noticeable in isolation), the uneven facial hair (slightly thin to one side but hardly dramatic), the light smattering of acne (easily dismissed as flourishes of an artist's style), and the big nose. Racially, this Ugly!Grantaire is ambiguous. In the works directly pre- and post- 'ugly Grantaire', User7 has drawn Grantaire's skin tone as substantially darker, which is notable. Ugly!Grantaire is not, however, the depiction of a white man from the user's first eighty-five posts from the same year, which indicates that the ambiguous skin tone is purposeful. Positioned at a time where User7 has begun to transition their artwork away from a white headcanon for Grantaire, the user has opted not to respond to a call for 'ugly Grantaire' with the dark brown skin they have been painting him with, which, if seen in isolation, might have implied the artist deemed brown skin 'ugly'. User7 does not, however, bring pink undertones into Ugly!Grantaire's skin, opting for the racial ambiguity of a tan middle-ground. We can see here the difficulties of envisioning a

character written by a nineteenth-century white French author in a way that fits the palette of the twenty-first century fan, as well as the trouble intrinsic to balancing a broad awareness of racial stereotypes with a demand for achieving 'representational' artwork.

RACIAL AMBIGUITY AND THE AQUALINE NOSE

As well as User7's Ugly!Grantaire, Users 3, 5, 6, 8, 9 and 10 experiment with giving their Grantaire headcanons an aquiline nose, especially in their transition from predominantly adaptation-based work to original, when the hooked nose is also tied to a tanned skin. While the aquiline nose is not featured in every headcanon of Grantaire, it is almost exclusive to him. In no artwork is the explicitly beautiful Enjolras given an aquiline nose; he is mostly portrayed with a long, straight, "Grecian" style nose, or where he is Black with a low-bridged, wide nose. No other character is given an aquiline nose but the occasional Javert, who is, as I will discuss later, most commonly depicted as being both ugly and a person of colour, and Éponine who is typically racially coded as dark-skinned and is the 'runner up' in beauty in comparison to Cosette. This leads us to assume that there is an association between the aquiline nose and ugliness, for this is the only trait that Grantaire is widely associated with.

Aquiline, from the Latin word meaning eagle, 'is most often used to describe a nose that has a broad curve and is slightly hooked, like a beak' ("Aquiline", *Merriam Webster*). While found among people from nearly every area of the world, the hooked nose is most commonly used to depict 'otherness', and with physical abnormality, from the caricatures of Jewish people in Nazi propaganda (Schrank 18) to the 'evil sheikh' in Hollywood depictions of Arabs (Shaheen 175). While noses are not 'infallible markers' for race, as Schrank points out in her consideration of the 'Jewish nose', the aquiline nose is the 'centerpiece of a

generic ethnic look' so widely interpreted that actors like Ben Kingsley can plausibly play

Iranian, Spanish, Russian, Indian and Jewish characters (Schrank 21). The 'generic ethnic

look' is of itself not a *bad* thing. Ethnic ambiguity is, has been, and will continue to become a

global reality because we do not live in a world that adheres to the eugenicist practise of

racial taxonomy. Artists have both the right and the reason to draw characters with a

multitude of features. What I do believe is that this 'generic ethnic look' is a tool fanartists

over-rely on when imagining otherness without referring to a specific race, because this sits

beyond the reach of calls of racism. As Wildman argues, white people 'know that they do

not want to be labelled racist,' but rather than address systematic racism they 'become

concerned with how to avoid that label' (Wildman 888). To be racist is often seen as a

violent act that is specifically anti-, whether that's anti-Black, or anti-Semitic, or anti-Arab. In

order not to be perceived as 'racist', fanartists opt for the 'generic ethnic look', which sits

them safely outside of being perceived to attack *specific* ethnic features.

In the 1850s, anti-Semitic anthropologist Robert Knox described Jewish people as

having 'a large, massive, club-shaped, hooked nose, three or four times larger than suits the

face [...] thus it is that the Jewish face never can [be], and never is, perfectly beautiful' (qtd.

in Schrank 24). Knox explicitly points to the size of the nose being too large to suit the face,

thus excluding Jewish people from beauty. In the digital painting, Ugly!Grantaire's mop of

hair and the transition into facial hair tightly frame the skull, leaving less space on the face

for his features. His eyes and mouth are thin, and work with the lines of his right eyebrow

and left dimple to draw the viewer's eye towards the nose. While I do not believe that this

Ugly!Grantaire fanartist or others like them have actively adopted a eugenicist's pseudo-

scientific racist belief that to be Jewish and to have a large, hooked nose is to be ugly, we

must ask why it is that the only *consistent* bearer of a large nose in fanart is the character

marked by Hugo as the ugly outcast. Shaheen discusses the parallels between othered

masculinity in Hollywood films, stating that:

> Instead of presenting sheikhs as elderly men of wisdom, screenwriters offer
>
> romantic melodramas portraying them as stooges-in-sheets, slovenly, hook-nosed
>
> potentates intent on capturing pale-faced blondes for their harems. Imitating the
>
> stereotypical behavior of their lecherous predecessors—the "bestial" Asian, the
>
> black "buck," and the "lascivious" Latino—slovenly Arabs move to swiftly and
>
> violently deflower Western maidens (Shaheen 180).

When one of the most common interpretations of Grantaire in fanworks is that he is a

slovenly, hook-nosed, tan-skinned and often lecherous man chasing after (or at least pining

after) the effeminate, pale-faced, blond Enjolras, it is hard not to imagine that fanartists

have internalised the common image of a racially ambiguous tan-skinned, hook-nosed man

with a desire to deflower the purity that comes with whiteness. I do not believe that this is a

consciously racist use of the trope, but this does, of course, make it all the more insidious.

As Sheheen argues, Hollywood has used repetition as a 'teaching tool, tutoring movie

audiences by repeating over and over, in film after film,' that to be hook-nosed, tan-skinned

and dressed 'slovenly' (not in Western clothes), whether they are Jewish or Black or Asian or

Arab or simply Other is to be *bad* (Shaheen 172), and this has been absorbed, even within

the minds of a fandom that self-attests to being racial-justice inclined.

Schrank makes the observation that '[s]ubtle discrimination is pernicious precisely

because it does its damage almost invisibly, is difficult to pin down, and is therefore virtually

impossible to document, challenge, or change' (Schrank 19). Grantaire's aquiline nose is part

of this subtle discrimination: while Grantaire is certainly never drawn wearing a kippah or

taqiyah, nor does he participate in non-Christian activities, if he was to be painted exactly the same as he currently is now but wearing a thawb or a kaftan, and was depicted raping a white Enjolras (as is sometimes a trope in fanfiction),[51] we would know that this was a capital R Racist portrayal, and would have the vocabulary to explain why this 'rape and random violence' fits into the history of racist images of the 'abject, racialized other' (Yee 2016, 194). The world of racial ambiguity, where skin colour and facial features could *imply* being non-white while treading the line of non-specificity makes it almost impossible to argue that damage is being done in fanart. Grantaire is darker-skinned but not so dark to imply that all-Black-people-are-Ugly, and he has a large, hooked nose, but it is not so racially specific as to suggest that he's Middle Eastern, or Jewish, or Black, or South Asian, or Southeast Asian, or North African. Grantaire is comfortably mixed-race to fit into the idea of 'ethnic chic' (Schrank 23) without drawing criticisms of racism.

There is an argument to be made that by giving fan-favourite Grantaire what is seen in global beauty standards as an 'ugly' nose, fans can reclaim the aquiline nose, but as has been the running argument throughout this thesis, if that is the point, why not give the explicitly beautiful characters Enjolras, Cosette, and Fantine the aquiline noses too, thus cementing the idea that to be beautiful is not always to have a Grecian, high-bridged, straight nose. In an art landscape where only one character has an aquiline nose, even if this is not a specifically Jewish or non-white feature, Grantaire cannot 'pass' as white because he deviates from the social, artistic norm. If fans truly wished to reject the idea of the hook-nose as ugly, we would find more portrayals of protagonists with the feature instead of their being relegated to the characters who are ugly, evil and brown.

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[51] As of June 2022, there are 110 ER fics on AO3 that employ the warning that the fic contains Rape/Non-Consent.

GRANTAIRE THE TURK

There is the possibility that fans, in giving Grantaire the hooked nose and tan skin, are attempting to reclaim a racist passage from the Hugo novel. In a long and sprawling drunken rant, Grantaire exclaims:

> I was made to be a Turk gazing all the livelong day at oriental scatterbrains performing that exquisite Egyptian dancing, lewd as the dreams of a celibate [...] Yes, I say Turk, and I'm not about to unsay it. I don't understand why everyone's so hard on the Turks; Mohammed has his good side; let's have some respect for the inventor of seraglios full of houris and of paradises full of odalisques! Let's not insult Mohammedanism, the only religion that comes complete with a henhouse!
> (IV,12,ii,898)

The passage contains the typical orientalism we might expect of the nineteenth-century Orientalist, including disrespect towards the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), the overzealous harem fantasy and the sexualisation of the exoticized 'Oriental Woman'. Grantaire voices and/or embodies Hugo's 'hand-me-down Middle Eastern images', including 'the femininity of the Orient' (where femininity means dangerous sexuality), 'the Middle East's reputation for both luxury and danger', 'laziness, storytelling, and dreaming', and its being 'subservient to the West' (Haddad 62-3). Translator Julie Rose also includes a note on this passage, commenting that 'Grantaire (or Hugo) seems to have confused his orientalist fantasies; the houri is usually the companion found in Paradise, while odalisques were found in seraglios

(harems)' (Notes 1308 #10).[52] Grantaire has potentially been given this speech because of the establishment of the Kingdom of Greece in 1832 (the year this scene is set) following the Greek War of Independence against the Ottoman Empire. David Montgomery posits that there would have been selective reporting in Europe given who would have been stationed in Constantinople, and while there were many reasons to support the Independence of a small country that relied on foreign aid, Christian anti-Islamic camaraderie cannot be overlooked as one factor of French support of Greek over Ottoman power (Montgomery 2022). Grantaire could thus be purposefully pro-Islam in order to rile those Amis who, having a Parisian bias, would conflate the Ottoman Empire or "Turks" with Islam, even beyond the pro-Independence sympathies they likely hold.

Given that the only character in fanart to have an apparent cultural identity outside of his being French is Feuilly, who is often pictured as having Polish ancestry because of his crying "Long live Poland!" (IV,11,iv,885) in the novel (a reference to his social justice awareness extending beyond the politics of France, but often interpreted as his having a Polish heritage), it would not be far-fetched to argue that the seeds of Grantaire's tan skin and hooked nose originated from this speech. Fans searching for a crumb of identity in these beloved characters without extended backstories find an association between Grantaire and the orientalist 'Turk' and latch onto the image, but remain wary of being perceived as racist, so do not explicitly label him as such. The Grantaire of fanart is feasibly Turkish, without the artist needing to examine why transposing a Turkish mix of features

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[52] Robb notes that it is not just non-white cultures that have been exotified by Hugo: *L'Homme Qui Rit* is 'plagued' with similar errors where Hugo 'made up, or misunderstood' English and Scottish names, places and words, and then doubled down on these when corrected (Robb 1998, 430). Nevertheless, Hugo held more power over the dissemination of what 'oriental' cultures come to look like than he did over stereotypes of England in the West.

over an orientalist character might be considered an act of colonial whitewashing. However, despite countless examinations of Grantaire's homoerotic (or at least homosocial) relationship with Enjolras, and how every non-Brick reading fan will learn from fanworks that Grantaire was in previous jobs a boxer and a dancer and a painter, fans do not disseminate the information that Grantaire has this Orientalist speech in the novel. While it may be fair to argue that this one passage may have been simply overlooked and thus lost from the feedback loop of fans homing in on certain elements of the text, I believe the lack of references to this passage in fandom demonstrates the unwillingness of fans to deal with the subject of race.

Grantaire is very much a fan favourite, oft-projected on by outcasted teenagers who feel a kindred spirit in the sarcastic and scornful (but still helplessly romantic) man. In the white queer fantasy land, Grantaire can be a fan favourite because he fits the ideal of a queer character. Roberts has written about the queer relationship between Grantaire and Enjolras,[53] but briefly, the relationship checks two key boxes: a) the Classical imagery of a homosocial relationship and b) the romantic comedy trope of an opposites-attract love-hate relationship. The Philhellenism of Hugo is prominent in queer fan spaces for much the same reason that it was for nineteenth-century queer people: it provides a link to historic and poetic queerness that was un-voiceable otherwise. Grantaire is compared to 'Pollux, Patroclus, Nisus, Eudamidas, Hephaestion, Pechméja' and is the Pylades to Enjolras' Orestes (III,4,i,544), some of whom were in, or speculated to be in, male-male romantic and/or sexual relationships and were enjoyed in the nineteenth-century by queer men as 'cheerful examples of male love' (Robb 2005, 144). While Grantaire is described as a serial womaniser

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[53] For an analysis of ER in fanworks, see Amelia Roberts' doctoral dissertation.

by Hugo, this is seen in fan spaces as a 'beard',[54] disguising his *real* romantic attraction for

Enjolras, which Grantaire could not make public out of personal (and legal) ramifications.

This adds flavour to the second point, where the star-crossed lover Grantaire is a physically

and morally ugly man with a schoolboy crush on a God-like beauty with stone-cold morals:

> Still, this skeptic was fanatical about one thing [...] Enjolras. Grantaire admired,
>
> loved, and venerated Enjolras. [...] A skeptic sticking to a believer — it is as
>
> elementary as the law of complementary colours. What we lack attracts us. [...]
>
> Beside Enjolras, Grantaire became somebody again (III,4,i,543).

Grantaire's sole motivation in life is to poke and prod at Enjolras, who is cold in return but

who relents finally as they die, hand in hand and smiling at one another (V,1,xxiii,1026). The

opposites-attract model provides a good character backbone to build from while the

doomed tragedy of their love (a 'tradition' of nineteenth-century gay literature (Robb 2005,

214)) allows a fertile ground for fan intervention and speculation. Grantaire's arguably

homoerotic/social relationship with Enjolras is however inextricably linked with Hugo's

views of the Orient. While not written to be *ethnically* Middle Eastern, Hugo's

characterisation of Grantaire as *oriental*-coded remains entrenched in the fandom's

understanding of him, and this goes unaddressed. Seen in much fanwork as an art-school

drop-out, tired and angry and madly in love with someone he should not be, it is this

Grantaire, a disaster bi[55] that fans project onto. This Grantaire can be coded as Turkish, yet

to explicitly name him as such would burst the bubble that has been created around the

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[54] A slang term to mean a person who is used, knowingly or unknowingly, as a romantic partner to conceal one's sexual orientation. In this case, Grantaire is posited as being hyper-heterosexual to disguise his homosexuality.
[55] A humorous self-identifier used by bisexual people to describe their typical state of being as messy.

white queer space. Much of the contemporary fanfic-writing fandom is built upon the interracial, interspecies relationship between *Stark Trek*'s Kirk and Spock (Hellekson and Busse; Coppa). The difference between the couple's cultural and biological make-up are foundational aspects of several tropes within fanfiction, where Spock's alienness is explored as new ground for fetish, while also serving to highlight Kirk's more than willing participation in Starfleet's directive for cross-community understanding. This xenophilia (in this case specifically to do with the outer-space translation of alien), is not always racial fetishism — but it sometimes is. There are works in which Spock's not-entirely-human body is the source of erotic desire for Kirk, the concept of *pon farr* (the Vulcan mating ritual) led to the creation of the wildly popular fanfiction trope "mate or die" (Penley 180), as well as *Star Trek* canon creating the related erotic categories "sex pollen" and "Aliens Made Them Do It" (Coppa 19). Each of these tropes fold alien cultural and biological sexual differences into a form of fandom community-created orientalism, in which these alien cultures are specifically designed for the erotic pleasure of the white man (Kirk) and through him, the white female reader. Penley asks what Spock's race is, arguing that:

> The history and prehistory of Vulcan is almost invariably written by the fans as an exoticized Asian martial arts culture or a romanticized Native American culture. Never, except for rare efforts to Egyptianize Vulcan history, do the fans touch on anything even remotely African. [...] They prefer to orientalize or romanticize the color divide in a strategic yet unconscious evasion of what has historically in the U.S. been the most bitterly contentious racial division (Penley 185).

It is not much of a surprise then that fans choose to infuse the Hellenistic influences into their *LM* fanart (often referring to Grantaire as Dionysus or drawing him ogling a marble

statue of an Achillean Enjolras), and establish Orientalist visions of ambiguous non-white racial identity while simultaneously disregarding Grantaire's two-page orientalist rant in order to protect their status quo. These recurring mythologies, as consumed and re-iterated by fans, go on to inform how the interracial dynamics of couples with 'alien' biologies (in this case returning to the original form of xenos), are treated. To point this discrepancy out would be to do damage to the escapism of the headcanon, with fans then having to position themselves as intentionally, retroactively or unwittingly racist.

FANDOM ROSETTA STONE

Deadric T. Williams argues that too many 'racial inequality scholars begin with the erroneous assumption that race leads to racism' (@doc_thoughts). Instead, Williams urges scholars to instead understand how 'inequality is the reason race arose as a historical category. Race did not produce inequality; inequality produced race' (Williams 148). Williams refers to the creation of racial categories by eighteenth-century European naturalists like Carl Linnaeus and Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (Saini 3; 47) who retroactively justified colonial racism in the form of genocide and enslavement by establishing a 'biological' factor and arguing the superiority of one distinct race over another. Racism, in their view, had a rational, scientific value behind it. Williams' assertion that racism precedes the creation of race is key to understanding how the *LM* fandom came to be *inevitably* racist.

In the decade since the Hollywood adaptation's release, there has been a significant decline in the use of the film's cast as face claims. Aaron Tveit, for example, was the standard face claim for Enjolras throughout the height of the fandom's popularity, and his

golden curls remain a legacy in Combo artwork. While the stage show casts and other

adaptations have enjoyed a slight rise in popularity, the far more popular trend since the

film's decline (with nearly 400 instances), has been a move away from face claims to the rise

in the Combo depictions: a set of unspoken rules, specific traits, features and outfits that

denote which character is which.[56] These rules are how I could sort ensemble works

(especially those depicting the Amis), where these characters are often not labelled

because, as Llosa says of the novel's Amis, they 'function as a collective character, especially

at the outset, when it is very difficult to tell them apart' (85). There were a few instances

where educated guesswork was applied, but this uncertainty was only present in 11/465

images.[57] As two users joke in a tumblr post:

> @alavolontedupeuplee: Who is more of an iconography expert, an iconography
>
> expert or a les mis fan trying to figure out who is who on a fanart
>
> @just-french-me-up: Being a les mis fan is like being an archeologist who just
>
> stumbled upon a new depiction of whatever pantheon, looking for attributes and
>
> symbols to identify the different figures like it's the fucking rosetta stone [sic]

To my knowledge there has been no singular post that set these rules, but there is an

understanding that with large casts of characters, fanworks are more consumable when

shorthand is employed. These shorthands rely on racialised tropes, which propagate racist

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[56] There are some notable deviations or prioritisations away from Hugo: Marius, for example, is described as having 'thick, jet black hair' by Hugo (III,6,i,577), but is typically portrayed with a quaff of light hair in the style of Eddie Redmayne or the numerous same-haired white men who have played Marius on stage and screen. Cosette has 'chestnut hair streaked with gold' in the novel (III,6,ii,580), but because of how ubiquitous the Émile Bayard illustration of her is, she is almost without exception portrayed as being blonde.
[57] Educated guesses were sometimes needed to distinguish between Marius/Courfeyrac/Feuilly/Bahorel. These were in img117; img133; img147; img149; img166; img170; img173; img184; img192; img204 and img207.

practice, and this goes largely unaddressed by both white fans and fans of colour to uphold

a stable, if fraught, status quo. In his consideration of the difference between cultural and

psychological stereotypes, Blum states that 'normal, unpathological individuals absorb

stereotypes from the world around them just because they live in that world', and that

while common parlance typically sees stereotypes as inherently negative,

> stereotyping is not the same as prejudice, and neither requires the other. Prejudice
>
> involves a negative affect toward a group and a disposition to disvalue it and its
>
> members. Stereotyping does not always involve prejudice in this sense (Blum 254).

Blum urges us to create a differentiation between stereotype and prejudice, and I agree that

not all shorthands within the fandom are deployed out of negatively charged emotion such

as hatred, jealousy, or resentment, but because of overgeneralisations made by the

dominant cognizer (here a white queer fan). I do however maintain that while fans are not

necessarily doing so out of purposeful, hateful prejudice, these stereotypes are harmful. As

Gatson and Reid observe, both the 'culture we make and the stories we tell/are told about

that culture matter. […] Misinformation and erasure may be promulgated through other

powerful cultural channels […] but mass-mediated stories', which include fanworks in the

fandom space, 'are that much more powerful because of their very nature' (4.9). It is

important, therefore, to remain aware that though not borne of explicit hate or disgust,

these stereotypes are ones that have been passed from fan to fan and will continue to do so

until we learn richer historical and political emotions, change our metaphors, and 'transform

our historical emotions' (van Schoor 214). Blum contends with the difficulty of how to assess

the extent of 'moral fault involved in stereotyping', especially regarding 'what historical,

cultural, and social knowledge it is reasonable to expect of differently placed persons and

groups' (Blum 279). It is unreasonable to expect every *LM* fan everywhere to know every stereotype of every group ever made. What I intend this research to advocate for is a fandom-wide gain of awareness of the pervasiveness of stereotypes, where they come from (certain adaptations, fandom lore or Hugo himself), and an encouragement to question the status-quo nature of certain short-hand racialisations within the fandom.

Given that Jenkins urges fan scholars, even those with 'complex and long-term relations' with the fandoms they study to 'still test their ideas with the larger community' (xiii), I have attempted to emulate and then test this shorthand using stock photographs rather than use fanworks to give a visual reference for anyone unfamiliar with these works without relying on a fan's real work (Figure 46). In an informal 24-hour survey of 1,019 fans, anonymous respondents were given a multiple choice set of names to label each stock photograph, 36.4% of respondents had 100% accuracy, 32.7% of respondents had 80-90% accuracy, 14.6% got three answers wrong, 6.5% got four wrong, and 9.6% got five or more wrong.[58] In feedback on the survey, there was criticism that the photos used to depict Marius and Feuilly were too similar, which echoed the most common erroneous answer given. Although not prompted to do so, fan respondents also reflected on when they joined the fandom (whether this was in the 2013 period or more recently), and there was some correlation between higher results and a longer stay in the fandom. This may suggest that these stock photos and the fandom shorthands they represent are becoming outdated, or that newer members to fandom have yet to be exposed to as great an extent of fanworks, which I would be interested in exploring in a future project. As it stands, the results of this

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[58] The most common feedback given by respondents with four or more errors was that they had never interacted with *Les Misérables* in any form, and only took the quiz because they had come across it on tumblr.

survey suggest that these fandom shorthands are pervasive enough that 69% of

respondents could name thirteen out of fifteen characters correctly.

Figure 46 A grid of stock image photographs of people, labelled with numbers.

1. Enjolras. A light-skinned man with blond curly hair, wearing a red shirt.
2. Grantaire. A white man with brown curly hair and light facial hair.
3. Marius. A white man with short, ginger hair.
4. Courfeyrac. A white man with slightly wavy hair, grinning widely.
5. Combeferre. A brown man with short, curly hair and glasses, grinning.
6. Éponine. A tattooed brown woman with slightly wavy hair, smoking a cigarette.
7. Jehan. A white person with long ginger hair, putting a plant behind their ear.
8. Feuilly. A white man with short ginger hair and a serious expression.
9. Bahorel. A white man with long brown hair tyed in a ponytail. He has a serious expression and beard.
10. Javert. A brown man with long black hair in a low ponytail.
11&12. Valjean and Cosette. Valjean is an older man with short white hair and beard. On his lap sits Cosette, a white girl with long blonde hair.
13. Joly. An Asian man with short black hair in a lab, wearing a face mask.
14. Bossuet. A Black man with a bald head, grinning.
15. Musichetta. A woman with long brown curly hair, the tips bleached blonde.

Combeferre is a young, upright man (III,4,i,537) most often depicted as having dark brown skin, but it is often ambiguous whether he is of South Asian heritage or whether he is Black. He typically has a Grecian, straight nose and short, straight hair, and so is only discernible as a person of colour by his non-white skin. On occasion he has tightly coiled hair and a low nose with wide nostrils, but this is less common. In canon-era images he wears a pristine three-piece suit and thin, round glasses. In modern!AUs he is depicted in a smart button-up, a simple, block-coloured jumper and rectangular glasses. Both mark him as respectable and bookish, at home in white suburbia or in an Oxbridge classroom. Jacques Rancière states that politics are the moments in which the uncounted or invisible subjects make themselves visible, and so cross-racial portrayals of characters is 'inherently political' (Miller 2020, 66). To choose to decide that Combeferre is a Black character, explicitly marking the intelligent, softer revolutionary as a dark-skinned man is a form of protest against the traditional portrayal of Black men as bestial. This political intent gets murky, however, when fanartists cannot seem to differentiate between Combeferre-as-Black or as-Asian, 'flattening all non-white identities into a false equality with each other' and making the incredibly inaccurate statement that there is a white/non-white binary where there are no conflicts or hierarchies between non-white racial groups (Nadkarni and Sivarajan 133). Tumblr user @ferret-not-microwave for example argues that the portrayal of Combeferre is likely coded as North Indian, which 'feeds into the stereotype of the mild-mannered, nerdy, overachieving Indian student/doctor', and that in fandom these depictions rarely interrogate cultural issues:

I'm yet to see Indian Ferre talking about caste, colourism and nationalism, while

talking about racism, sexism and queerphobia. The only time when that culture is

actually questioned is when the fear of queerphobia comes up, but not all Indian

families are queerphobic (case in point, my own family) and queerphobia isn't the

end-all of all Indian family issues.

This user questions why Combeferre is the only Amis that is coded as Indian, and why this

vague identity is always 'surrounded only by kheer, tikka masala, Diwali and Holi, without

any exploration of numerous other Indian identities' ("okay I've been mulling"). Despite the

likely positive intent to code an explicitly nice and intelligent character as being dark-

skinned, the execution belies the lack of critical thinking put into this racebend and

Combeferre becomes the visual representative of the 'BAME' bracket, with no cultural

specificity.

Courfeyrac is often depicted as golden-skinned with loose, brown curls, potentially

putting him in the same category as tumblr-favourite actors Darren Criss, Tyler Hoechlin and

Tyler Posey, whose white and Chinese/Filipino, Native American and Mexican ancestries

give them an ambiguous mixed-race appearance that have allowed them to take roles

across racial lines but are not distinct enough to categorise them as what we culturally

imagine someone who is Asian, or Native American, or Mexican to look like. Courfeyrac is

often casually dressed, and with a cheeky, good-humoured expression (V,1,xiv,995). He has

the 'diabolical beauty of wit' and is a kind-hearted charmer (III,4,i,540). He is often

characterised within fanworks as being a flirtatious, charming man, set at odds to Enjolras'

frank coldness and Combeferre's level-headed calm. Courfeyrac's ambiguous ethnicity

carries the stereotypes of Latin American and Mediterranean flirtatiousness, depending on

whether the viewer is European or North American, but again without naming a specific

continental heritage, let alone a country- or state-specific one.

Feuilly is a slightly older young man dressed less expensively than the others (III,4,i,539), often headcanoned as white with short red hair, pale skin and freckles. This is likely because of the common interpretation of his having Polish ancestry, the pervasive whiteness reflecting the mono-racial demographic of Poland. I touch later on Feuilly's depiction in fanfiction, where he is also commonly headcanoned as being South American.

Bahorel has a large build (III,4,i,540-1), a good-humoured expression (IV,11,iv,886) and is typically either white or Black. As the latter he wears his hair in dreadlocks. Jehan is most often white and typically portrayed as androgynous or as effeminate, with long hair and an extreme shyness inherited from his portrayal in the novel (III,4,i,539). This is despite Grossman observing that Jehan is 'an alter ego' of Hugo who has a 'manly voice' that echoes 'Hugo's injunction that a civilizing people must be virile' (Grossman 1994, 235). Given the racial stereotypes assigned to characters thus far, it is unsurprising to find here that Bahorel, the man coded as muscled and hyper-masculine, who gets into brawls and is described as 'provocative' (III,4,i,540) is more often portrayed as Black in fanworks than the flower-power poet Jehan (III,4,i,538) is. It also speaks to how the conceptualisation of poetry has changed from being the legacy-building, national project that Hugo believed it to be towards an inherently feminine, pacifistic idea in the mind of the twenty-first century fan.

Bossuet is portrayed in fanart as being a Black man with dark brown skin, a wide, flat nose and thick lips, but there is no cultural specificity to imply whether he is a sixth-generation Black-Parisian, an African or Caribbean first-generation immigrant, or if he is a British or Brazilian or Swedish nationality Black man who has landed in Paris on his year abroad. The only physical descriptor Hugo gives us is that he is bald (III,4,i,541), with Grantaire commenting that his 'cue ball' head hurts his eyes (IV,12,ii,898). Hugo does not

specify whether Bossuet wears his hair this way for fashion (closely shaving it by choice) or because of his genetics, and it is unclear as to why the headcanon of Bossuet as Black became so prolific. As previously mentioned in my analysis of Enjolras' Blackness, Bossuet's being Black is likely yet another racial stereotype. The Sambo stereotype, which portrays African Americans as being 'irresponsible, lazy, humble, dependant, [...] grinningly happy and basically infantile' ("Sambo Stereotype", *African American History*) echoes Hugo's description of Bossuet as being good-humoured but clumsy and often down on his luck: 'Bossuet was a cheery boy who had bad luck. His speciality was not to succeed at anything. On the other hand, he laughed at everything' (III,4,i,541). Compared against racist propaganda and the 'happy-go-lucky' Black man of the slave era (Blum 278), depictions of Bossuet are startlingly similar.

Musichetta is most often racially ambiguous, with brown skin and thick, wavy hair. Musichetta is only passingly mentioned in the novel, but Musichetta, Joly and Bossuet are most often shipped as a polyamorous relationship because Hugo tells us that Bossuet and Joly 'lived together, ate together, slept together. They shared everything, even Musichetta, a little' (IV,12,ii,894), which fans currently opt to interpret as a consensual polyamorous relationship. This interpretation was not always the *de facto* headcanon, as can be seen in the comment section to Musichetta's wiki page, (which is significantly larger than the section of canonical facts about her), where users debate whether this line implies Musichetta is Joly's mistress or partner and is cheating on him with Bossuet, or whether Musichetta is a 'whore'. It is unclear whether the anonymous user means the word as a value judgement of her promiscuity or as a job description, but either way, it is used with negative intent. This anonymous debate continued for two years between 2013-15 (Anonymous "Musichetta #Comments"). In the novel, Joly describes Musichetta as 'a

wonderful girl, very literary, tiny feet, tiny hands, dresses well, white, plump; eyes of a fortune-teller' (III,4,iv,553). Despite this very clear description of Musichetta as white, one of the only characters in the novel to be given a skin description (more common in female than male characters), Musichetta is portrayed as a brown-skinned woman of colour in fandom. This might be because fans take the final descriptor 'eyes of a fortune-teller' and transpose on her the image of Esmeralda, especially as depicted in Disney's *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*, making the link between Hugo's own portrayal of fortune telling and Rromani stereotypes. Both Esmeralda and Musichetta have the same light brown skin, wavy dark hair, thick eyebrows and slight but busty figure; barely ever white nor plump. As women of colour are more often fetishised than their white counterparts, it is almost unsurprising that the woman once dismissed as a 'whore' by fans is portrayed as a racially ambiguous woman with an athletic build. This is especially unsurprising when we consider how, as Levine states, it was commonplace in British and European colonial thought to 'constitute prostitution as an often racialized throwback to primitivism, where passion and lust rather than reason and control ruled' (Levine 7) in order to endlessly proclaim a European hierarchy of control that is still used to 'exert tremendous power' over women of colour (328). We rarely see Musichetta portrayed as a fat, dark-skinned Black woman, or as a hairy, dark-skinned Southeast Asian woman, or indeed as a plump, lily-white skinned white woman with tiny feet and tiny hands. Despite being a markedly feminist and social-justice oriented fan space, the *LM* fandom still carries with it the marks of white patriarchal sexual preference, stereotype and anti-sex work mentality.

Joly is often depicted as East Asian, but very rarely is his ethnicity broken down past his having epicanthal folds and short, black hair. He is typically short and slight, wearing round glasses and with pale skin, denoting him likelier to be East Asian rather than

Southeast Asian. Unlike the 'ambiguously ethnic' Courfeyrac and Grantaire, in fanart Joly is

clearly of a different race, but there is no indication as to whether he is of any specific

cultural heritage. Joly is described by Hugo as being 'young, fastidious, [...] full of life' and a

malade imaginaire; an 'imaginary invalid' or hypochondriac (III,4,i,542). Joly is typically also

depicted as being asexual, even within a romantic (sometimes sexual) relationship with

Musichetta and Bahorel. As argued by Sarah Sinwell, 'disability, Asian-ness, and nerdiness'

are frequently constructed as desexualised bodies because they do not 'fit cultural codes of

desirability' (Sinwell 166). The only other character portrayed as East Asian consistently

across fandom depictions is Cosette, the pair projecting timidity, subservience and

smallness. Courfeyrac, who is irresistibly charming, is never East Asian even despite a line

from the novel that might usually be snapped up: 'Courfeyrac may well have been speaking

Chinese' (IV,9,ii,856). Bahorel, who is big and buff, is never East Asian. Marius, the dopey

but handsome leading man, is never East Asian. As Yee argues, this stereotype of the Asian

male as 'androgynous', 'effeminate and homosexual' is a trope of French colonist fiction

from the turn of the nineteenth century (Yee 2001 269), which partially bridges the gap

between Hugo's time of writing and a contemporary fan's conception of the East Asian man.

While potentially unconscious of doing so, fans make connections between effeminate

homoromanticism, asexuality and the medical profession with East Asian men, leaning into

several common stereotypes of East Asian men while constructing Joly (Chirapiwat 2022).

LIBERTY, EQUALITY, DIVERSITY

Fanartists see race as skin colour and occasionally as wider or flatter facial features to

blanket over headcanons, but never as active cultural or ethnic identities. Les Amis' racial

identities are skin-deep and non-specific, easily interchangeable and without consequence.

The Amis of fanart might look like a group of ethnically diverse, socially active young people, but they eat, dress, and celebrate as white French men do. Food seen eaten or prepared are cakes and pizza; clothes worn are standard nineteenth-century French fashion or current student-wear (hoodies, t-shirts with social justice logos, ripped jeans).

As a majority-white fandom mostly based in the United States, the fandom calendar operates on a Christian one: fic-drives (community-run days or weeks of activity based around a theme 'which encourage and organize creativity for the general pleasure of the group' (Coppa 5)) occur in the lead-up to Christmas, New Year's, Valentine's Day and Barricade day. There is some encouragement to make the winter holiday season non-denominational (often including Kwanzaa and Hanukkah), but iconography (and even the specific date of culmination on the 25th of December) emphasize the events' rootedness in the Christian celebration. These events are also planned to coincide with the fact that many fans will have time off school or work due to state recognition of Christmas as a national holiday, leaving more time to create longer or more elaborate fanworks. These events are therefore seen as 'universal' and thus unifying; something that is not extended in France, the UK or USA to festivals such as Eid or Passover. Just as Lunar New Year or Diwali might be recognised as off-hand 'other' celebrations, these are not marked on the universal calendar as either state- or fandom- national holidays. As of June 2021, there was 1 *LM* fic that celebrated Diwali, 1 that mentions Yom Kippur, 10 celebrations of Hanukkah, 2 mentions of Passover, 2 Kwanzaa (but both only as a part of 'Winter Holidays' and not a specific factor in the fic itself), 1 Eid celebration, 2 observations of Ramadan, 0 that celebrated "Lunar" or "Chinese" New Year, Chuseok, or Obon. There was one mention of Philippines Independence Day but no other Independence days. In comparison there were 675 that mentioned Christmas, 155 New Year, 127 Valentine's day, and 363 written for Barricade

Day. While this amount of Christmas-flavoured fic is only 1/30 of the total fics in the fandom, in relation to the absolute lack of any other celebration, it is a stark image of the fandom's relationship with festivities. Holiday celebrations bring some of the easiest backdrops for cultural signposts: while it can often be awkward and undesirable for characters to announce themselves as being of a non-white/non-Christian background apropos of nothing in a fic, festivities come in-built with cultural markers like food, sound, smell, clothing, and family feuds. However, because the characters of *LM* (with the exception of Marius, Cosette and the Thénardiers) do not have families, and because there is a prevalence of the 'found family' trope (in which the Amis adopt one another as familial relations), we only ever see characters interact within the social sphere of one another. When the majority of these characters are headcanoned as being white-North American or white-French, the familial influence of inherited non-white, non-Christian festivities have no way to infiltrate.

There is a parallel here, in this fandom space, with the current socio-political position of France. As Oluwatayo Adewole states in a tweet:

> The situation in France is (amongst other things) a pretty good reminder of how even when somewhere is 'secular', cultural Christianity is a powerful and oft violent force. This is [especially] true in the West where Whiteness and popular understandings of Christianity are intertwined. (@naijaprince21)

This sentiment, especially the reference to violence is echoed by the tongue-in-cheek user @arabian-batboy on tumblr:

> France be like: "to maintain our secular values we decided to ban all people of all religions from praying toward Mecca. This law is not meant to target Muslims

specifically as it is enforced on all of our citizens regardless of their religion" [meme of Agatha Harkness winking over-exaggeratedly] #and then they go and celebrate the 258 Catholic national holidays they have #love selective secularism.

France, these two people argue, is openly hypocritical when it claims that France has divided the church from state while simultaneously taking national holidays on the Assumption of Mary and Ascension Day. This falsely-obtuse pro-secularism within France purposefully ignores the effects these bans have had specifically on Muslim people within France, and echoes the unsaid cultural-Christianity of the *LM* fandom. While there is no ban or law on the celebration of non-Christian holidays in the *LM* fandom, the fandom is selectively secular, creating work *en masse* only to celebrate Christian Traditions. Even Thanksgiving, the notably white, US-American celebration, has 26 fics: more than the sum total of every other major non-white/Christian holiday. This is of course not the same kind of human rights breaching violence that a law banning the wearing of a niqab is (Barnes, *The Independent*), but speaks to the palpable feeling of otherness that is created by a fandom that, while desiring 'visible' diversity, makes little effort to research, much less *celebrate* cultures other than its own. This is not to argue that all people of colour, whether in the diaspora or otherwise, must fly the flag of the homeland, proclaiming their exact heritages at all times, eating and dressing 'ethnic', but to call fanart 'diverse' seems disingenuous. When every character of colour has perfectly assimilated into white French-ness, whatever cultural specificity they may carry is forced behind-the-scenes. This assimilation is part of Nation building. As Hobsbawm states, the French language 'was essential to the concept of France, even though in 1789 50% of Frenchmen did not speak it at all', because the minority who *did* held political weight (Hobsbawm 60). This focus on what consisted as being 'French'

assisted in separating the French 'us' from the non-French 'them', or 'real human beings from the barbarians who cannot talk a genuine language but only make incomprehensible noises' (Hobsbawm 51). Perhaps some of the Amis are bilingual, some might have first-generation immigrant parents, some may wear a Sari or Sarong or Kente for special occasions in private, but these are never traits made visible in fanworks. 'Barbarisms' have been made invisible in preference for hegemony. Perhaps one or two of the Amis do not have specific ties to a culture beyond Paris as happens in the real world, but to pretend that a group this large and multi-ethnic has *no* influence from non-white cultures is what makes these portrayals skin-deep.

Hugo himself announces that no 'feature of the universal face is lacking in Paris's profile' (III,1,xi,488), and that all 'civilisations are there in condensed form — and all the barbarisms with them' (III,1,xi,489). If we take 'barbarisms' to mean cultural specificity that does not align with white, French cultural ideals, it is almost ironic that Hugo can paint his nineteenth-century Paris as being multi-ethnic and can accept (while with racist terminology) that the melting pot is made 'superb' (489) by the hodgepodge multiplicity of the immigrant city, but that fanartists opt to make the culturally-specific 'barbarism' invisible. Whether this is out of a fear of misrepresentation or because of the incorrect idea that non-white peoples did not live in nineteenth-century Paris, fanartists effectively complete the colonial period's forcible assimilation of people of colour into whiteness, creating a portrait of a post-racial world where race is purely taxonomical and where culture is monolithic; a place where white, French 'civility' has won.

I agree with Boeckner, Flegel and Leggatt when they state that to 'ignore race and culture when producing diversity characters [suggests that the] fan base is fine with persons of color as long as they continue to engage with issues that center whiteness and avoid

those that reference their own specific racial or cultural heritage' (189). Just as in the nineteenth century, where French writers collapsed 'race, ethnicity [and] cultural distinctions' into one 'black/negre stereotyped abyss' (Sharpley-Whiting 8), when you are able to racebend a character and not change how they navigate the world, not change their relationship with society, then you have not considered how race is not just about skin tone and bone structure but about community, family, history, religion, language, food, shared traumas, worldviews, context and the vibrance of celebrations. As fan Chris mentions, this lack of awareness is a hallmark of white-created characters of colour:

> Bossuet will say something like "oh just talk to the police!" okay, okay… I'm sure… that's exactly what a brown man… in a politically charged environment on an American Campus would say… [Chris 01:18:16]

Chris points to a scenario in which race *does* play a factor that cannot be papered over with assimilation. Here, a Black man could not realistically engage with the police in the same way a white man could. Nadkarni and Sivarajan link this 'surface engagement' with Edward Said's theory of orientalism, where these skin-differences 'indicate more about the fan creator and the fandom than about the peoples or cultures being othered' (124). In *LM* fanart, we can understand far more about the majority-white fandom's pre-occupation with wanting to appear non-racist than we can about the characters' ethnic backgrounds. As fan Ivanna states, characters are "vaguely person of colour, insert potential race here, and that" [01:12:25]. I argue that this racial masquerade is a form of 'digital blackface',[59] where the

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[59] The internet-era successor to blackface and blaxploitation is digital blackface, where emojis, GIFs, memes and art are used by non-Black people to objectify Blackness for non-Black amusement ("Digital Blackface", *Dictionary.com*).

zeitgeist desire to link the fictional revolutionaries with current-day equivalents is well-meaning but is not truly 'inclusive' because as Nadkarni and Sivarajan argue, true inclusivity requires 'deeper consideration and critique' (124). Brown!Combeferre, Ambiguous!Grantaire and Black!Enjolras act as visual buffers to the accusations of racism, absolving white fans from the responsibility of self-education. Nadkarni and Sivarajan conclude that:

> While an argument could be made that the fan writer has no responsibility or reason to engage specifically with race in these situations, this suggests that race is a context that can be discarded when inconvenient, a factor not afforded in reality to people of color (133).

White queer fans in the *LM* fandom clearly care about and do actively donate to current political movements like BLM, but they also ultimately choose to protect themselves over dismantling white supremacist mentalities. Disguised behind pigmented skin, this group of characters have been given a race that *fulfils* racial stereotypes. Racism precedes race because these characters are categorised based on personalities that 'fit' with concepts of race. "Joly being Asian because he's the nerdy, awkward type and [...] Courfeyrac being Latino because he's [...] flirty", Chinami points out [00:23:25], "because Bahorel is tough, Bahorel [...] can be a Black man, can be a big, strong, tough guy, who can speak in a person way, and can often come across as *bad"*, Chris says [01:22:00]. Karla points out the discrepancy between these fictional characters and a hypothetical real scenario she might find herself in:

> if Les Amis was real, like the modern!AU, [I] would never, not in a thousand years be in one of their meetings, because imagine being in a room full of dudes in their 20s,

and they're all white, and they're talking about social issues to you?! No! Yeah that sounds horrible, I would never [Karla 00:58:40].

This joking statement serves as a reminder that these characters are supposed to embody people a social-justice-minded person would want to be in a room with, which belies the lie at the centre of many portrayals of these characters: that they are actually as "diverse" as they seem to be on first glance.

PART THREE: A CASE STUDY IN JAVERT

Figure 47 A spreadsheet that compares the skin and hair colour of Javert and Valjean. Javert's skin is on the whole darker than Valjean's. Javert's hair is typically dark, and Valjean's hair is typically white. There are descriptions of the images, the user's tags, and a notes section.

Moving away from the Amis, I now focus on one of the most consistently racialised characters in the fandom, Javert. 54/63 depictions of Javert (when paired with Valjean) portray Javert with darker skin (Figure 47). In only two works does Valjean have darker skin because he is of a different race, and in the remaining eight, both have the same colour white skin, or Valjean is a slightly more tanned white man than Javert. Valjean is described

by Hugo as being a labourer, and as having sun-burnt skin (I,2,i,51), and it is reasonable to

assume Valjean might be fairly tan as a man who spends much of his time outdoors. In

comparison, Javert is very often covered-up: 'You could not see his forehead, which was

hidden under his hat, you could not see his eyes, which were buried under his eyebrows,

you could not see his chin, which was plunged into his cravat, you could not see his hands,

which were retracted into his sleeves' (I,5,v,145), which might lead us to imagine him as

having an ashen skin colour. There could be some argument that the aesthetic contrast of

the dark (evil) versus the light (good) is a thematic one for the pairing and so plays out in

their skin tone in fanart (which would also be racist), except that this skin tone difference is

comparative. When filtering by skin tone, darker-skinned portrayals of Javert are most often

matched with darker-skinned Valjeans, and the lighter Javert's skin, the lighter Valjean's is.

If this were a purely metaphorical or aesthetic choice, there would theoretically be a greater

divide between the darker-skinned Javert and the lighter-skinned Valjean to match their

being the representations of the bright sun and the dark night. These portrayals of Javert as

a person of colour are also not based on a specific face-claim, with only one fanart of David

Oyelowo's Javert and one of Norm Lewis', all other face-claims being Russel Crowe. Both

Oyelowo and Lewis are Black, which is not the race Javert is racialised as by fandom. There

has been no actor of colour who has played Javert with the features given in fanart. This

leads me to the conclusion that this Javert is what fandom collectively pictures as Rromani:

yellow-toned brown skin, blue-black, slightly wavy long hair, dark, thick eyebrows, and light,

often blue or grey eyes. Despite only one artist *explicitly* naming Javert's race as such within

my data corpus, I argue that there is a fandom-wide feedback loop of Javert being portrayed

with these features, which began with his misrepresentation as being Rromani.

While not necessarily a scholarly source, it is useful to analyse Javert's Wikipedia

entry because, as a crowd-sourced display of information, it is a good measure of the

prevailing general opinion of the character and shows what information about the canon is

received by a mass audience. Wikipedia informs us that because of Javert's mother's

occupation as a fortune teller and 'the book's statement that he belonged to a '[g-slur]

race',[60] it has been 'hypothesized that he was intended to be ethnically' Rromani. In Rose's

translation of the Hugo:

> Javert was born in prison to a fortune-teller who read the cards and whose husband
>
> was serving time in the galleys. As he was growing up, he felt as though he were on
>
> the outside of society and despaired of ever getting in. [Javert was] clouded by an
>
> inexpressible hatred for that race of bohemians to who he belonged. He joined the
>
> police. He did well there (I,5,v,144).

In this one paragraph we are given a set of information including Javert's parentage, his self-

hatred, his inherent criminality, his being outcast, his rising once he has separated himself

from his family and thus from his race, and this supposedly adds up to the conclusion that

he must be Rromani. Yet this conclusion, which is accepted enough to land a fairly

prominent spot on his Wikipedia entry, likely originates from a choice in translation. Hugo's

original line is Javert's 'inexprimable haine pour cette race de bohèmes dont il était' (I,6,ii,

LM 171). In 1862 Charles Wilbour translated Hugo's adjective 'bohème' into English as a

reference to Javert being '[g-slur]' rather than as an evocation of his parents' bohemian

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[60] I chose to use 'g-slur' as well as the double-R in 'Rromani' because this is what was used by Rromani user
STFU Gadje.

lifestyle (*CW:LM* 115). The sixth edition of *Dictionnaire de L'Académie Française* defines 'bohème, ou bohémien, ienne' as:

> Une sorte de vagabonds que l'on croyait originaires de la Bohême, et qui couraient le
>
> pays, disant la bonne aventure, et dérobant avec adresse. Une troupe de bohémiens.
>
> On les nommait aussi Égyptiens.

> [A sort of vagabonds who were thought to originate in Bohemia, and who roamed
>
> the country, telling fortunes, and deftly stealing. A troupe of bohemians. They were
>
> also called Egyptians.]

The examples given are anecdotal, referring to women who use cunning to achieve their ends, people who lead travelling lives without 'fire nor place' and keep among themselves, or houses where there is 'neither order nor rule'. The seventh edition (1878) adds the names 'Zingaris' and 'Gitanos' to the definition. The 1867 edition of *Grand Dictionnaire Universel Du Xixe siècle* defines 'bohême' (their equivalent to when it is spelled 'bohème') as:

> Nom donné, par comparaison avec la vie errante et vagabonde des Bohémiens, à
>
> une classe de jeunes littérateurs ou artistes parisiens, qui vivent au jour le jour du
>
> produit précaire de leur intelligence

> [Name given, in comparison to the wandering and vagabond life of the Bohemians,
>
> to the class of young Parisian writers or artists, who live day to day through the
>
> precarious product of their intelligence] (866).

Larousse then includes a multi-page ethnography of various travelling peoples (collapsed into one group), also ladening the descriptor with ideas of fortune telling, begging, stealing and wandering. When describing *Les Bohémiens de Paris*, a five-act play written by François Ponsard with Eugène Grangé and performed in 1843, Larousse claims it was the greatest success of the year, beating out Hugo, Dumas, Scribe and Balzac in charm, wit and skill (869). In his description of the play, Larousse describes an 'authentic […] pure-blooded bohemian' as being 'mysterious and melancholy like old Egypt', 'noble and gentle like kings of the Orient' and as 'tall fellows with black pupils, open nostrils and tanned skin', unrecognisable from the 'awful and vile thugs' that are, assumedly, the mixed-race, unauthentic 'bohémien' of 1843.

Wilbour read Javert's parents' fortune telling and criminality as evidence of the family's race. Fahnstock and MacAfee's choice to re-iterate this translation in 1987 means that a new generation of Rroma were affected by the propagation of the idea that to be Rromani is to be criminal. This translation has had a visible effect on the interpretation of Javert in scholarship: Masters-Wicks offhandedly states that Javert's 'g-slur' heritage is a key part of the imposter syndrome that means he 'thus clings to an external authoritative discourse to counter-balance his inner turmoil' despite for the most part referencing the original French language version (Masters-Wicks 98), and Grossman and Stephens argue that Javert's 'origins had been so thoroughly repressed that he was fated to suffer a crisis of identity' in the musical adaptation, quoting the Fahnstock and MacAfee translation's use of the g-slur to describe him (2017, 390). This has also had significant effect on fandom. Fans of colour (especially Rromani fans) have had to disentangle their real identities from 'well-meaning' but still racist caricatures placed upon them. This is not without consequence. In a blog post titled 'There's a Grief That Can't be Spoken', a Rromani tumblr user who calls

themselves *STFU, Gadje*[61] talks about the fan discourse over whether or not fans should portray Javert as Rrom in their works. This discourse has transformed over time from: 1) as Hugo explicitly calls Javert Rromani, we should not white-wash him, (as @captainhooksgirl and @pmfji discuss on tumblr), through to 2) the unpicking of the Wilbour translation and the offensive conflation of criminality with being Rromani, encouraging an avoidance of portraying Javert as being of colour at all (@femmehawke, @soft-jehan and @sugalcookie in discussion in the tumblr post "Javert being Romani"), all the way to 3) gadje attempting to 'reclaim' the Rromani identity for Javert, as if to do so is to make Victor Hugo spin in his grave (*ibid*). *STFU* concludes their thoughts on this exploration of fandom by stating how it goes 'unremarked-on' that fans do not interpret Marius or Cosette, the romantic leads, or Enjolras with his 'revolutionary furor' as being Rromani. It is only the self-hating character who is interpreted as being Rrom:

> I am troubled by this because it's one of those things that well-meaning gadje often fall into - thinking that by championing the idea of Javert-as-Rromani they are championing the representation of us in fiction, when in fact all they are championing is a gadje's (racist) idea of who we are and what defines us as a people. (@STFUgadje)

As an example of this false-championship, in 2014 a tumblr user posted the following fictional exchange:

> Me: *points at javert* luv that Romani charecter

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[61] STFU: Shut The Fuck Up. Gadje: non-Rroma.

Fandom: nnNO... . . what? Only... . . Knly white in france ever........ . Not erasure jst opinin.....

Me: *points at Javert* that Romani charecter. Luv em [sic]

The user asserts, then re-asserts Javert's being Rromani to the rest of the fandom, the fictionalised personification of which replies that Javert should be depicted as white because only white people live in France, which is claimed not to be erasure, just opinion. This user types in a hyper-inflated online-speak, playing with spelling, punctuation, and capitalisation, as well as the roleplay-borne asterisk to connote *an action* in order to exaggerate how people in fandom spaces will often deflect criticism through the adoption of child-like confusion. This user criticises how, in performing this self-infantilisation, fans will feign ignorance in order to reduce any sense of culpability. While the post is intended to be anti-racist (the user championing Javert-as-Rromani against the wishes of the rest of the bigoted white fandom), the assertion in the post goes against the thinking of users like STFU-Gadje, who ask gadje to move *away* from the antiziganist glorification of a self-hating Rrom when considering who to portray as Rromani. Originally written in 2014, the post had a re-emergence again in fandom thought when it was reblogged on International Rromani day in 2021. In the seven years since the post was made, the fandom has not shifted in opinion, still having the same conversation about Javert-as-Rromani.

This is especially curious because, as mentioned previously, while Javert is more often portrayed as being darker-skinned and of Rromani heritage than Valjean, the people of Digne assume that Valjean is Rromani due to his appearance: 'some bohemian, some barefoot [g-slur], a dangerous beggar of a man' (I,2,ii,62) ['un bohémien, un va-nu-pieds, une espèce de mendicant dangereux' (LM 88)]. The beautiful ingénue Cosette is also

referred to as having 'in her veins the blood of the bohemian and the adventurer who goes about barefoot' (VI,5,ii,762) ['dans ses veines du sang de bohémienne et d'aventurière qui va pieds nus' (LM 806)], using the same vocabulary that implies race not just lifestyle. It is interesting here that when translating the vitriol of a racist town, Rose chooses to use the slur, but in describing the confidence of Cosette uses the more neutral 'bohemian'. While these descriptions also play into the stereotype of a criminal and a beggar being assumed to be Rromani, I have yet to see a portrayal in fandom that names the protagonists Valjean or Cosette as Rromani in fanworks, turning the negative perception into an opportunity to portray Rromani characters as being complex, multitudinous people.

Part of the longevity of Rromani!Javert is precisely because it *conforms* to recursive stereotypes,[62] which makes acceptance of the racialisation simple. Translators and fans alike are more ready to accept that Hugo might have been racially insensitive by creating a stereotypical Rrom character and then actively choose to *continue* to lean into the stereotype than they are to go against 'canon' by imagining the beautiful, non-Fortune Telling, non-criminal Cosette as having Rromani heritage. This is not helped by Hugo's own ill-written Rromani characters in *Notre-Dame de Paris*, a text that is arguably more well-known in the public domain because of the Disney film adaptation in 1996. Because an analysis of *Notre-Dame de Paris* is not within the scope of this study, and because the popularisation of it through the adaptation have been talked about by others (Lacroix 214; Craven 236; Grossman 2001, 487), I will not go into an in-depth analysis, but it is important to note that *LM* is not the only site of discord between Hugo's characters and Rromani stereotypes, and that the representation of Rromani people in these other texts will have

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[62] Archives such as https://www.romarchive.eu/ are set up to counteract this pervasive stereotyping.

great influence on how people interpret Javert. Yet Esmeralda, the French child 'snatched' by a Rromani family but racialised in the Disney film (and general cultural imagination) as having brown skin and wavy black hair might has not had any influence on the depiction of Cosette. These women, who share a history as the love child of a sex worker and a nobleman and raised outside of their birth family in abusive situations are not paralleled in adaptation but Javert, who in fanart has dark skin and dark hair, could be a sibling of Disney's Esmeralda. Given both Javert and Cosette only have one descriptor as 'bohème'/'bohémienne' each, and Javert's skin is not made brown by Hugo in the novel, his racialisation as Rromani centers entirely around a conflation of 'fortune teller' mother and 'criminal father' with an ethnic group.

Additionally, because Rromani peoples exist within the realm of the semi-fantastical for many gadje because of historic marginalisation and miseducational propaganda, I suggest that the headcanon of Javert as Rrom is formulated and handled the same way a depiction of him as a Vampire or Elf might be: through the recycling of media tropes. This sits in opposition to the extent of research that might go into the handling of a more common occurrence. For example, within fandom circles is the fairly popular term 'Britpicker', where a British person is hired to 'nit-pick' fanfiction set in the United Kingdom to ensure that it is culturally accurate (making sure, for example, that Sherlock Holmes says 'rubbish' instead of 'trash'). This concept of cultural consultancy is not one that is extended to other cultures to the same degree. This will partially be because there are more British fans willing to volunteer to undertake this labour for free, especially when Britishisms are regarded with a kind of charm that other 'foreignness' is not, and also because there are so few characters of colour in Western media that this service is rarely required. Because fan spaces have only a small Rromani population, there are fewer people to point out mistakes

and bigotry than there are for Britishisms. There is no access point for education in a fandom structure that relies on self-education for growth, and so stereotypes persist. However, the fact that Britpicking as an established community of highly-requested people is unrivalled by any other group of consultants in fanfiction circles reveals some level of disregard shown to other minority groups when it comes to willingly undertaking research. This then becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy, in which new fans of colour are turned away by current standards, feeling excluded by the casual bigotry and so choosing distance over committing to going into fandom simply to educate others.

This argument towards an 'undereducated' fandom does, however, place this fan thinking in the realm of unconscious bias, reducing the agency of fans in upholding these stereotypes. Critically, it has never been headcanoned in the *LM* fandom that Javert is a mixed-race Rrom where the 'hatred for that race of bohemians to who he belonged' is a hatred towards a *white* criminal father. Rromani Javert never embraces Rromanipen at the expense of hating his white, French family, despairing that he was not born a full-blooded Rrom. If fans truly were exploring a desire to see Javert as Rromani and yet still wanted him to be self-hating of his heritage, this possibility might have been raised in order to dispel some of the conflations between non-whiteness and criminality. But, because a desire for assimilation into white Frenchness is assumed, this possibility has not been suggested. While it can of course be argued that a period-typical racist attitude and a desire for assimilation in order to achieve safety and status would lend itself to the first reading more than the second, this surely should not prevent a fan from experimenting with a confident and self-affirmed Rromani Javert who only succeeds because he separates himself from his white family. This reading has as much evidence as the fan standard, and yet fans have yet to allow Javert a deep and meaningful desire to be Rromani.

ROMANI!JAVERT

Unlike all other head canons in this fandom, Rromani!Javert is cultural not just racial, so in order to explore this common headcanon in some greater detail, I will consider two texts, an online fanfiction and a self-published novel. *A Reflection of Starlight (ARoS)* is a currently unfinished fanfiction hosted on AO3, published between 2015-18. It is 67 chapters long[63] and sits at 379,106 words. It is the third-longest *LM* fanfiction on AO3. *Barricades: The Journey of Javert* (hereafter *Barricades*) is a novel self-published by C.A. Shilton in 2013. It is approximately 140,000 words. I have chosen to compare these two because they are of comparable plot and visibility. I have also chosen two authors whose participation in fandom activity differs: the author of *ARoS*[64] visibly partakes in other fandom activity and communicates with other fans on tumblr, whereas if Shilton does partake in fandom activity, she does not advertise this on her professional accounts. This makes one a fanfiction that is part of the networked community of online fans, and one an adaptation made outside of fandom. The following is an analysis of how these two white authors[65] handle the treatment of a Rromani character. Hellekson and Busse observe how close readings of fan texts (one 'subgenre of academic literary analysis') are rare (19), which

[63] Due to a lack of page numbers, I will reference chapter numbers in place of page numbers.
[64] Following Fazekas, I have chosen not to name the author of *ARoS* but do not disguise the fic title. Given that the fanfiction has a TV Tropes page, is the longest fanfiction in the Javert/Valjean tag, and a hit count of over 60,000, I do not believe I am unduly amplifying the fanfiction, but it is not a published novel as Shilton's is, and so some precaution to protect the author's visibility has been taken, including using the neutral they/them pronouns to refer to them.
[65] The author of *ARoS* states that they are a white person in the notes to the fanfiction. C.A. Shilton has a blog in which she describes herself. She is fairly candid about her life, and does not refer to being Rromani, or receiving any ethnic abuse as she discusses instances of sexism within the police force. While this does of course not constitute 'proof', given her openness to disclose sexist malpractice in order to promote her second book about a female police officer, I would argue that she would have advertised her lived experience as Rromani to promote her first.

Coppa states is likely because there is 'something perverse about looking at a single fanfiction story in isolation, apart from the community that produced it' (11). I therefore iterate that the choice in only doing a close reading of one text is not to isolate it as the *only* example, but because it is emblematic of how a fandom can become a place that develops community tropes and mythologies that become well-received novel-length fanworks with fandoms of their own.

A REFLECTION OF STARLIGHT

ARoS is tagged as being a 'Fix-it' fic (a fic that 'fixes' canon by re-imagining scenes or characters) and has a 'Post-Seine' setting, used to denote that the majority of the fic is set after Javert's canonical completion of suicide in the novel by jumping into the Seine. *ARoS* focuses primarily on the relationship between Javert and Valjean as they progress from enemies to friends to lovers after Valjean saves Javert from drowning. The author describes it as a 'story about compassion, tenderness, and reconciliation' (*ARoS 1*), and given that it is only 30% shorter than Hugo's *LM*, it gives a considerable amount of attention to addressing what the author refers to as the characters' Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

The Javert of *ARoS* is described as having 'long brown hair—so dark as to almost be black', with 'dark' brown skin (*ARoS* 3; 65). He is able to shift his accent 'into something entirely different', and he mentions how even if he is able to 'mimic' French 'so perfectly that [his] heritage cannot be discerned from the way [he] speaks,' his mother tongue is not French for it is those first words in Rromani that provide him comfort when he is scared, and that these very words will never allow him to 'forget what' he is. The author of *ARoS* gives Javert the first name Ferenc, shortened to Ferkó (*ARoS* 40), which, he tells Valjean, means 'French'. 'He paused, expression darkening. "There is one other meaning," he said. "'One

who is free'." Javert dislikes being referred to by this first name, for it brands him as being other: 'Why would [I] need to be reminded of [being French and free] if it were truly the case?' (*ARoS* 42). The adoption of his surname as his only name is his way to assimilate, refuting any claim of his not being French. In the romantic sections of the fanfiction, we see some instances where Javert's racial features are seen in a positive light: as they first kiss, Valjean feels compelled to call Javert by the more intimate Ferkó as he plays with his 'long, dark hair'. Javert muses that he 'had hated that name; he had hated it from the depths of his heart—but to hear it spoken thus, from Valjean's lips, it seemed the sweetest thing he'd ever heard' (*ARoS* 66), a play on Valjean's own hatred of his name as discussed in Chapter Two. This is the first positive association he has about his appearance and his name, and it is a sustained effort on Valjean's part to convince Javert that Valjean finds him attractive. While this is partially because of their mutual inexperience with romantic relationships and to desire/being desired, Javert is unused to being complimented on his appearance in any situation because of his racialisation in white, French society.

Javert's 'frightfully pale eyes' are repeatedly referred to as being an 'icy, piercing blue' (*ARoS* 4; 11; 33), especially when used in contrast: 'cold, bright blue against brown, brown skin' (*ARoS* 42). They are a physical symbol of his oddity: too dark-skinned to be French, but too light-eyed to be Rrom. This contrast is a fascination had with many mixed-race peoples because of the strong association of blue eyes with Aryan whiteness, set against brown skin symbolic of foreignness, as was seen around the fascination with Sharbat Gula, the 'green-eyed girl' from the National Geographic's cover in 1984 (Sephton, *Sky News*). As Shaheen points out, it is unsurprising that Arab people have a variety of features as there exists a 'mixed ethnicity in the Arab world—from 5000 BC to the present', with occupation from across the globe (Shaheen 173), and this mixed ancestry applies similarly to

nomadic Rromani peoples with Northern Indian and Western Eurasian heritages. However as discussed in the BBC's treatment of the Thénardier children, this preference for (or eroticisation of) light eyes is an aspect of colourism, where 'skin color, hair texture, and facial features that bestows privilege and value on physical attributes [are those that are] closer to white' (Wilder and Cain 2010, 578). That the most often commented-on feature of Javert's physique are his blue eyes prioritises their importance: this Javert is to be remarked upon for how he takes space between white and non-white.

There is only one moment of external hate-crime that happens within the narrative of *ARoS*, where Thénardier calls Javert a 'darkie', to which Javert immediately responds: 'with a disappointed look on his face. "Is that really the best you could do? 'Darkie'? Surely you can think of more creative derisions than that"' (*ARoS* 40). Javert mentions previous instances of his childhood and within the police system, listing slurs directed towards him (*ARoS* 42). Throughout this scene, Javert wrestles with internalised racism that tells him that his identity makes him inherently criminal, and that it was his personal hard work that absolved him of this inherited 'sin'. When ARoS's Javert doubts himself and has a panic attack over his behaviour, he hears a litany of voices who shout half-heard phrases at him:

> You miserable little— / live with yourself if you— / —of a [g slur]? / the second you
>
> try to—/ [...] —the lowest scum of the earth. / know he doesn't deserve— / matter
>
> what you think? / [...] You're nothing.

Self-hating thoughts of uselessness are interspersed with racial slurs; implied to be remembered excerpts of past discrimination he has experienced. There is only the one explicit slur, but multiple references to his status as 'scum', or as someone who has no worth. What he remembers most are the links between his race and his use to society.

BARRICADES

In her afterword to *Barricades,* Shilton states that she has tried to 'put some meat on the skeleton of Javert's story', but that it was in no means intended as a re-telling of *LM* (Shilton 298). In fanfiction terms it is also a Fix-It fic, with a latter portion set Post-Seine, but it is majority Canon-Era, and is occupied with providing 'Missing Scenes', filling in gaps left by the original narrative. It follows Javert through his life, from birth to canonical death (and beyond) with the intent to provide a backstory not written by Hugo.

The Javert of *Barricades* is described as having 'thick dark hair' (Shilton 11), a 'solid build', 'tall' with 'dark eyes' (Shilton 43), and 'pleasing features' (Shilton 129). There is no reference to his skin colour; his mother is 'pale' and 'ashen' (Shilton 17; 67), though she is close to death when being described. It is only when it is convenient for the plot that Javert can be clocked as being 'visually' Rromani, the novel written as if his race can be removed like a costume. When he is a child Javert is able to play the role of white original character Philippe's brother with no issue of being found out: 'he'll be good cover for you' (Shilton 31), when he is a young adult in a new police uniform he knew no-one 'would call him *[g-slur]* now!' (Shilton 87), and as an adult he goes unquestioned by his superior officers:

> Oblivious to his discomfort, the Inspector was talking to him about the [g-slur people]. "Never forget, they're all scum, all thieves." [...] He continued to talk disparagingly about the [g-slur people]. Next to him, Javert thought of the medallion he still wore beneath his uniform. He felt a sudden rush of shame, wondering what the Inspector would say if he knew he was patrolling with the son of a [g-slur].'
>
> (Shilton 133)

Javert's Rromani heritage is often attached to the medallion he wears, a memento of his

mother. Twice upon meeting people from a Rromani encampment does Javert see himself

in their eyes, as if the eyes 'looking up at him might have been his own' (Shilton 132). Yet his

brother, who is described as having a face 'identical to his own' (Shilton 238), cannot

recognise him as being Rrom until his medallion is revealed. Javert's being mixed-race (an

assumption he has held since childhood) would assist in this white-passing ability and is

implied through his ability to disguise himself to some degree until he is revealed to have

dual Rromani heritage at the conclusion of the novel. This is not to argue that to 'be

Rromani', whether mixed-race or not, depends on skin colour, facial features or an

enforcement of any specific 'look', but that it sits at odds with how, when Shilton wishes for

Javert to be identified as Rromani, she refers to Javert's 'dark eyes', comparing them to

'magic mirrors' (Shilton 132). This depiction encourages a reader to be on guard for

'irregular' features on an otherwise white-passing, attractive man; his foreignness

categorised not as being because of cultural differences, difficulties assimilating or any

learned behaviour, but because ultimately he cannot disguise physical identifying features

of otherness. If we were to follow the belief that Javert was able to appear as a white

French man without the medallion, there would be less emphasis on his physical features.

Javert's unnamed brother (referred to only as the Headman) is posed as being

separate from Javert because of his use of Rromani words and phrases, interspersed within

his speech. This sprinkling of languages other than English within the speech of bilingual

characters is often perceived negatively by fans of colour because this characterisation is

unnatural for most whose first language is not English. This method explains to the *gadje*

reader what words like 'chavvie' and 'karma' mean, displaying the author's research, but at

the cost of the Headman's humanity. The Headman prioritises casual displays of his

apparent Rromanipen over conversing with his brother as one would when talking to someone you know does not share your language. The nameless brother who flavours his French with foreignness is a helpful tool for exposition and as a foil for a gadje reader, but as the only other Rromani person in a speaking role, he becomes a simple token for otherness. This trope, of mixed-race or bicultural siblings growing up separated under different systems with the Westernised brother brought up in the diaspora 'returning' to the community he 'should' have been in only serves to place a binary divide between heritage, implying that that there is a hard choice to be made between adopting one parent's homeland over the other. This thought process implies a not necessarily intentional but distinctly segregationist mind-set. In *Barricades* it becomes obvious that Javert was simply not suited to joining white society, no matter the sacrifices he has made in order to assimilate. Despite never having interacted positively with any other Rromani person, the narrative implies that he would have been better off if he had abandoned these efforts of trying to pass as gadje, as embodied by the police, and grown up with his Rromani family instead. Perhaps, *Barricades* argues, if he *had* indeed been mixed-race, with a white French father, he might have succeeded better at disguising his foreignness because he would have that influence to assist him. There is no room in this narrative for people who are capable of juggling dual- or multiple- heritages and cultures: one either belongs or does not.

In comparison to *ARoS*, the Javert of *Barricades* is exposed to frequent and multitudinous slurs. Between the prologue and the first chapter Javert is subjected to race-based hate-crimes three times. In the first five-page chapter he is referred to by a slur seven times. Javert is raped twice and beaten several times through the novel, once so severely with a rod that he cannot move for several days. We are witness to these graphically described accounts. It is likely that Shilton's intent behind the violence is for the reader to

gain sympathy for Javert. Javert compares his mother to Fantine (Shilton 190), leaving us to place him in place of the child Cosette, the character who earns the most pathos in Hugo's novel. No character who abuses Javert is a 'good' character, when he discovers that three policemen had attempted to rape his pregnant mother before his birth, framing his father for retaliating, realising that the police treatment of Rromani people is unjust and leaves the police himself. While it could be said that this likely well-intentioned narrative brings attention to the injustice faced by minority communities like Rromani people, this constant brutalisation only further feeds the assumption that it *is* realistic for Javert to be racialised as Rromani because the self-hatred *makes sense*. The premise of the story makes the assumption that Javert *would* reject Rromanipen in favour of whiteness, and it is his failure to assimilate fast or well enough that sees him punished. When we are witness only to negative interactions marked as being the standard existence of being Rromani, we come to the conclusion that it would be better to be white, because we are not given any positive attributes.

I posit that this novel is intended for a white reader, not a reader of colour. Within *Barricades,* Javert carries the burden of caging *himself* in the institutionally racist system, where incidents of abuse are contextualised as being entirely preventable, should Javert have chosen alternate action. Javert does not change his own mind or the system because he needs the guidance of a white hand, he is 'rescued' by original characters Michelle and Philippe, white saviours able to free him from his destitution. This minimalizes the role of whiteness in the creation of the system in the first place, pointing not to white institutions to change but demanding that self-hating Rromani must be rescued from their lives by the hands of a hero. Shock-tactic brutalisation assumes that a *gadje* reader can only be convinced that Rromani people are not *biologically* criminal through the repeated 'unjust'

violence done towards this man and his family, and that institutional reform is only necessary after the most heinous of crimes; not before them, or to prevent them. We are told that this *victimised* race can only be granted freedom from oppression when they have endured enough catastrophe that even a *gadje* reader can accept this is not deserved. It takes Javert surviving two sexual assaults and several decades of corporal punishment from his adopted guardian in order to be seen as human enough for a gadje reader to sympathise with. In reducing Javert's backstory to one of racism, we accept that to be a man of colour is to hate one's self, and one's community, and to desire whiteness. Ultimately, though Javert has a 'happy ending' by returning to his family, the story ends before we see Javert and his brother reconcile or enjoy one another's company; their shared heritage remaining lodged in ideas of brutality and hatred, not in family, community or culture.

STFU!GADJE

Both of these works attempt to give Javert Rromani heritage, from the position of a white author championing the representation of a minority. Both attempt to unpack the internalised racism inherent to a man of colour hating his parentage for his inability to pass in white society, with *ARoS* dedicating more time to the unpacking of the fallout of the assumptions and *Barricades* building a more explicit view of his upbringing. The author of *ARoS* makes use of footnotes and endnotes throughout the fic to provide personal commentary on the chapters. In one, they note: 'the views expressed here are not necessarily my views, but the characters'', and that Javert's internalised racism is 'really fucked up and not okay and I don't want you thinking that I think it's okay because it's not.' This has the advantage of separating the author's opinion from that of their characters, as well as allowing the author to state that as a white person, they welcome critical feedback:

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I'm also trying to ease off [discussing Javert as having internalised racism] as much as I can because it's just ? not my place?? [...] and I can't claim to fully understand these issues as someone who has never experienced them??? But I'm also trying to have representation in this story and I just?????? Can only try my best on the topic but it also might be crap and if it is I apologize and welcome recommendations (*ARoS 42*)

This self-reflection and the contents of the fic lead me to believe that despite some overuse of stereotypical narratives this fic can be seen as a useful exploration of race, written to discover the boundaries of a popular headcanon when experimenting with a Hugo-esque dedication to historical research. The desire for self-education and the willingness to stand corrected while attempting to explore a common racialisation of a character are features that mark this fanwork as going beyond the typical skin-deep portrayal of race in this fandom.

I have argued that while one is more violent than the other, both were seeded from the same first thought: that should Javert have been Rrom, he would have experienced external acts of racism and that this would feature as at least partial reason for his dedication to the police (and thus to assimilating into whiteness). They are both convincing, in that it is believable that this character, having experienced these racialised lives, would certainly wish to disguise himself as white in order to live a life with less bigotry. The author of *ARoS* has more awareness that their depiction is not necessarily one that is positive, encouraging their reader to criticise them. I believe the issue however remains in the original argument laid out by STFU Gadje, who called on fans to expand their vision of Rromani peoples from self-hating criminals and fortune tellers to a multi-faceted group of *people*. Both narratives are sufficiently able to create compelling depictions of non-white

race as being a negative factor in Javert's life, but neither narrative addresses positivity, companionship or, as I will explore in the final chapter, racial *euphoria.*

CONCLUSION

The problem of fandom racism is far from being *LM* specific. In a study of the top 100 ships on AO3 in 2016, only 12.5% of characters from Western media were of colour, compared to a US census that estimates a population of colour being 38.4%. In a visual presentation of every character of colour in the 2017-2019 ship stats, light skin is pervasive, with no Black or dark-skinned character featured, the bracket dominated with K-pop stars and anime characters (Centreoftheselights "Fandom's Race Problem"; "What does a 'Person of Colour' look like"). Despite this, I had expected that, because of the novel's main theme of social justice and the fandom's eagerness to participate in and donate to contemporary racial and gender-equality movements, there would be a reduction in intra-community racial and gender stereotyping. What I found instead was that racism lies within insidious forms of racialisation. As Suzy [she/her, biracial] points out,

> I think the core issue is that *Les Misérables* was created by a white author for a white audience, and the fandom is still largely white today. […] In canon era, can you ignore how France tried to keep non-white people out of the country, or how Napoleon reinstated slavery in their colonies? I don't think the solution is to put people of color in the roles of white characters if that "representation" is going to be inauthentic to the stories of real, actual people of color who lived in that time

If fandom truly wanted to talk about race, Suzy argues, we would move away from simply discussing what skin colour we might make a white man, and instead consider who existed

in the contemporary time period, dedicating time and effort to considering their under-represented histories. In doing so, we understand how white supremacist viewpoints continue to influence our gendered racialisations of the characters. Several fan blogs are, for instance, dedicated to the minutiae of canon-era facts and figures, including but not limited to dissecting law-codes and the running of the prison Toulon (@prudencepaccard) both of these in order to create 'accurate' fics set in the imprisonment of Valjean, cataloguing the prices of expenses mentioned in the novel thus working out era-accurate wages (@akallabeth-joie), and year-accurate fashion, maps and French language/slang (@pilferingapples). I have yet to come across a similarly comprehensive blog detailing racial justice in the canon era, nor fans making parallels between the characters of *LM* with the real and ongoing forms of structural racism. This direct discrepancy between a desire to create "diverse" characters while being unwilling to quantify how race comes attached to institutional consequences speaks to the white desire to skip over the step of discomfort in the process of moving beyond racism. Jenkins argues that only by 'analyzing the structures of the primary text can we fully understand what fan interpretation contributes in the process of appropriating these programs for their own uses' (284). In the final chapter, I will therefore continue to unsilence non-white racial and non-cis gender historic identities in an attempt to marry ideas of undermining Eurocentric perspectives while pushing what we conceive of as a 'canonical' reading of Hugo through the lens of the fan that prioritises a racial reading.

CHAPTER FOUR: Re-reading Hugo

UN-SILENCING 'CANONICAL' READINGS

I have so far presented how generations of people from author Hugo to adaptors like Davies to fanartists on sites like tumblr and AO3 have created links between dysphoria, hatred and being a gender non-conforming person of colour. In doing so, these writers have re-asserted the antiquated, colonial belief that cisgender whiteness is the pinnacle of human beauty and success. This not only affects a reader by reinforcing white supremacist beliefs, but also the readings themselves, encouraging us to believe that readings that deviate from this formula hold less validity. In this final chapter I borrow again from Stam's concept of 'unsilencing' a text to do a reading of Hugo's *Les Misérables*: not to ignore or put aside what I have previously discussed but to look towards a mixed reality where being a transgender person of colour is not solely synonymous with negativity. Prasad is a similar advocate of 'overreading' a text, in which she builds on Nancy Miller's *Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing* (1988) by creating a methodology in which she 'aims at deciphering the silences in a text and filling in its gaps' (Prasad 124). These uses of adaptation theory, where we wield multiple contexts of debate to do a reading of a text to 'unsilence' it is productive as it allows us to navigate complex criticisms across centuries of time. In using our contemporary voice and access to knowledge, we can unsilence parts of the novel that were previously held to differing censorship standards (Robb 1998, 323), while also cross-examining contemporary works to locate where and when legacies of racial and gendered stereotypes are crystalised. In doing so, we are being 'attentive to the past for the purposes of critiquing a present' (Muñoz 18).

It is useful to do this through the interpretation of transgender fans because, as Rose

argues:

> Like all fanfiction, transfic presents an opportunity for making visible alternative or
> additional readings of the source text. [...] transfic does not merely respond to its
> source text but to a variety of others as well, thus providing insights into how fan
> cultures circulate, criticise and develop their own discourses and practices (Rose
> 2018, #35).

Here, transgender readings done by fans in fanfiction (transfic) both turns the lens back on Hugo's text to deconstruct racial-gender formulation while also revealing how ideas of race and gender are transmitted to and between the contemporary fan. This desire by fans may also form part of a desire to legitimise transgender autonomy and power through an identification with canonical 'great' literature and Classic writers. Tumblr user @vvaugh (2019) posts an unattributed quote from Victor Hugo in which he says: 'George Sand cannot determine whether she is male or female. I entertain a high regard for all my colleagues, but it is not my place to decide whether she is my sister or my brother.'[66] @vvaugh adds a commentary to say: 'Victor "trans rights!" Hugo', using the quote to claim that Hugo should be celebrated as a cisgender ally to the trans community, the pivotal concept being that it is not *his* place to decide Sand's potentially queer gender identity. In bringing the Great White author on side as a trans ally (even through a relatively neutral quote about a probably-cisgender Sand), the transgender fan can secure their potentially unstable roots on someone with more secure footing. Claiming Hugo for the transgender community is an act

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[66] Amelia Roberts (@byjuxtaposition, 2019) discusses the quote in context on their blog as part of Samuel Edwards' 1972 biography of George Sand, though notes that the quote is uncited and unreferenced, with no date, context or additional information attached to it.

of political entrenchment, building security against a conservative society that disallows the 'other' from having a cultural ancestor and/or ally.

As discussed in Chapter Three, fans of colour are cautious when skin colour is the only change made in a racebent interpretation. Fans like Suzy ask us to consider the realities of race within the work of racialised readings rather than simply doing a race-bend of a character in which their new race has no effect on their place in the world, thus ensuring that we do not do readings that are 'inauthentic' to the stories of real, actual people of colour. This is similar to Vergès in her call to memorialise the Black people whose memories have been desecrated for non-Black comfort (Vergès 26-7), where language and history are contorted and redacted. While I wish to incorporate euphoric readings of the text, I do also intend to keep in mind how these readings balance with the realities of people with marginalised genders and races from the time. These readings are not intended to be comprehensive but to be used as beginnings: as ways to reconsider how these characters can be conceived outside of our typical notions of 'canon'. Just as in Chapters One and Two, where I have made reference to the real race sciences in occupation from the nineteenth to twenty-first centuries, throughout this chapter I consider how racialisation changes the readings that we do, incorporating both racial dysphoria and euphoria and noting how and when a reading falls back on tropes or stereotypes.

I define a reading not as a description of canonical facts as dictated by Hugo, but as interpretations that have been and can be achieved when negotiated by readers who are often from the global majority and are gender diverse. These readings are not necessarily a *new* tradition*:* as Robb asserts, no one 'thought that Victor Hugo was a closet homosexual, but his poems were popular with gay readers' like Marquis de Custine and Marcel Proust during the time of writing because they recognised their queerness in Hugo's work (Robb

2005, 227). To do these readings I rely on academics like Carr, Robb, Tooth Murphy, Furneaux and Prasad, whose work gives precedence to this approach. In his article, Steven Alan Carr embarks on a study of adaptations of Hugo's work that resonate with the Holocaust. Carr states that:

> While one could argue that this approach reads too much meaning into a text or reads meaning that is not there, much of the work in cultural studies suggests that meaning does not reside in the text as vessel, but rather emerges out of a negotiated relationship between text and reader (Carr 52).

Robb writes similarly in his work on queer readings of nineteenth-century literature, where he observes that when an academic reads expression of heterosexual desire they are doing literary criticism that demonstrates the work's 'universal relevance', but when reading texts as expressions of homosexual desire, they are accused of engaging in 'appropriation' and 'conscripting a writer for the cause' (2005, 215). As previously discussed, Amy Tooth Murphy asks us to accept that cisgender heterosexuality is just as much of a subjective bias in research as queerness is, and as such, any reading done from what has long been perceived as 'outsider' identities holds as much objective value as a person with sexual, racial, or indeed *any* interlocking combination of identities. Furneaux's work furthers what we might consider to be a valid 'queer reading', arguing that readings that only focus on queer brutality and violence draw on the assumption that queerness 'presents a threat to, or a radical break with, respectable culture' (2013, 207), and urges us to move beyond these. I will therefore be leaning on Carr, Robb, Tooth Murphy, Furneaux and Prasad's approaches in the following section to argue that in purposefully and flagrantly

appropriating Hugo for the euphoric cause, we will begin to see non-white, non-cis

identities not as misappropriations but of universal relevance to literary criticism.

   This chapter will purposefully not address the history of male/male or female/female

homosexuality in Paris in the period because I believe these to be well-documented

(Roberts 2023; Robb 2005; Furneaux). I will, however, be considering alternate sexualities

and genders not often analysed in literary criticism. While we cannot ascribe sexualities that

did not have explicit definitions in the period, I do believe that in stating that we cannot

read identities that did not have exact names, we are falsely claiming that these sexual and

gender identities were 'invented' in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In doing so we

uncritically accept the cis-heterosexual society's narrative that 'perversions' (often tellingly

lumped under such a slur) are 'new' and thus 'anachronistic'. In an 1869 pamphlet, Karl-

Maria Kertbeny coined the terms 'homosexual' and 'heterosexual', providing some of the

first 'neutral' terms for sexuality. In the following years, he then also described

'monosexuals' and 'amphisexuals' (qtd. In Katz 52-3), which we may understand as

asexuality and bi/pansexuality in contemporary parlance. Though the prominence of this

terminology came a few years after the publication of *LM*, especially with the popularisation

of it in Richard von Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* in 1886, we can understand that

knowledge of and conversations about sexualities other than 'heterosexuality' existed in the

period. Indeed, heterosexuality itself would also be anachronistic to use as a term when

referring to a novel published in 1862. I would therefore argue that the criticism that such

readings are 'anachronistic' lies more with the lack of education in the contemporary critic,

whose personal belief in the cis-hetero binary means their refusal to acknowledge that

heterosexuality and a two-gender society are younger concepts then we are often led to

believe. I will thus freely use contemporary terms for identity rather than finding analogous

nineteenth-century ones in order to push our concepts of what we can understand to be 'canonical' or 'period-typical' readings.

WHITE WOMAN COSETTE

The most euphoric reading we can do for Cosette is to unsilence that she is a white, cisgender woman, and that Hugo specifically racializes and genders her because of an inherent belief in white supremacy, epitomised in Cosette's self-affirming statement: "No doubt about it, I am beautiful!" (IV,3,v,735) ['Décidément, je suis belle!' (LM779)]. Cosette is categorically white. Hugo's male characters make it clear that her beauty lies in her 'luminously white' skin (IV,3,v,733), 'silky' (II,3,iv,322) 'chestnut hair streaked with gold' (III,6,ii,580) and in her eyes, which are 'a deep celestial [azure] blue' (III,6,ii,581). Valjean is pleased that he has been able to ensure that his daughter's hands are no longer rubbed red and raw through manual work but that on her wedding day they are 'nice and white now' (V,9,v,1193). Dressed in her wedding clothing, lavishly described, Hugo states that 'all this was in white and, in all this whiteness, she shone. It was exquisite candour opening and being transfigured into luminosity. She looked like a virgin on her way to becoming a goddess' (V,6,ii,1123). This whiteness is a purposeful one: as discussed throughout, Cosette stands for the innocent and the pure, the beauty of French civilization in comparison to the savage evil poor.

As Stephens notes, Cosette 'remains a contested figure' (2019, 13) who is:

widely seen by critics and audiences alike to be a prime stereotype of idealized femininity [...] she personifies the eternal feminine: a heaven-sent combination of docility and comeliness whose only purpose is to garland the lives of those around

her [...] On posters and covers as on the page and stage, Cosette is used as an

abiding and conspicuous object of pathos and longing (1-2).

Llosa, for example, sees Cosette as 'completely soulless, because she is so insipid and

because she accepts life with a resigned indifference (91), and Roche calls her 'increasingly

static and passive (2007, 80). This Cosette has been appropriated by conservatives to further

the opinion that women should be deprived of autonomy, where 'occupying a secondary

place in a man's world, Cosette becomes an ornamental prop for bourgeois paternalism'

(Stephens 2019, 3). Stephens warns us that there are readings we can do that avoid a

simplistic reading of Cosette in which 'a less neutralized, more self-possessed female

character is glimpsed' (4), and Lewis, too, notes that Cosette's 'awareness of her own

beauty' (which I maintain is adherence to a categorically white female beauty), 'is itself the

instrument of her new-found capacity to affect her world' (Lewis 2016, 71). It is this Cosette,

who is aware of her status, that I argue must be named as a white woman.

There is some argument to be made that Cosette could have some 'oriental'

ancestry, the vague and antiquated terminology used here to encapsulate Hugo's

vocabulary. Hugo tells us that: 'Seeing that Marius wasn't coming to her, she decided to go

to him. In such cases, every woman is like Mohammed' (IV,3,vi,737). Cosette's mother

Fantine is described as being 'a woman of the most beautiful Orient' (I,3,vii,116), though

Hugo does not expand on what aspect of the 'orient' Fantine embodies. Hugo also makes

reference to an 'eastern tale [that says] the rose was made white by God, but that when

Adam looked at it as it was beginning to open, it was ashamed and went pink' (V,1,x,989).

['Un conte d'orient dit que la rose avait été faite par Dieu blanche, mais qu'Adam l'ayant

regardée au moment où elle s'entr'ouvrait, elle eut honte et devint rose.' (LM 1042)] This

story may perhaps be a perversion of a much-debated story about the Prophet Muhammed in the *Lisan al-Mizan* in which some accounts state that his perspiration created the white rose ("Muhammad and the Splitting of the Moon", *Answering Islam Blog*), but the story Hugo tells of a rose turning pink from embarrassment does not seem to be attached to a story I can find from an Islamic, North African or East Asian background. As Haddad observes, Hugo's characterisation of Islam and the Middle East 'appear mainly the products of his imagination, inspired [...] more by the conventionalized literary motifs of orientalism than by any scholarly investigation of the subject' (Haddad 61). Robb notes that this is not a new accusation of Hugo's works: Charles Nodier appeared to suggest that Hugo's *Orientales* 'owed more to the East India Company than to oriental scholarship' (1998, 126). Haddad argues that the conventions of orientalist literary art depended on 'European readers' inability to verify poems' portrayals of the Orient,' which meant that poets could 'manipulate their depictions unchecked' (Haddad 6). This reading of Cosette as 'oriental' thus relies on stereotypes of the Orient. When the only evidence we start from in a reading is a perceived Islamic barbarism, the vague fetishism of 'oriental' women and Islam's mythical status through a potentially made-up story, we perpetuate the idea that to be a woman of colour is to be erotic, weak, defenceless and, above all, at the whim of male sexuality. When Hugo repeats metaphorical references to his fantastical constructions of the 'orient', this influences a reader's view of the character, creating unwitting associations between Cosette and Islam, just as I argued the fandom-wide interpretation of Grantaire as Arab-aligned might have been because of his anti 'Turk' speech. These references may not mean these characters have literal ancestry outside of European, but it does tie them in our consciousness to tropes of 'oriental' peoples.

Problematising a reading of Cosette as a woman of colour is how Cosette ends the novel dehumanised, her lack of desire for independence made synonymous with passive, beautiful, 'feminine' unintelligence:

"You must think I'm a real ninny. What you have to say must be pretty astounding! Business, investing money in a bank, that is really something! Men play at being mysterious over nothing. I want to stay. I'm very pretty this morning. Look at me, Marius" (V,7,i,1146).

Meyer argues that the 'fundamental metaphor — yoking white women and people of another race [...] coincides with the manifestation of an anxiety that things are not quite as they should be' for a man of the 'Anglo-Saxon race' (Meyer 7). When Marius returns from the barricade he is injured; this loss, complete with its physical manifestation through the negatively presented disability and his sickroom setting has metaphorically emasculated him, placing him in the sphere of those that need caring for, rather than being a physically and mentally virile, able, young, man. As both Thompson and Stephens argue in reference to the Franco-Prussian war, 'the overtly feminized female body has the power to undermine and indeed reverse the demasculinization of the male body' (Thompson 74), a much needed 'affirmation of masculinity […] when French virility looked in need of restoration after the humiliating defeat' (Stephens 2019, 4). As racial scholars like Natcha Chirapiwat and Roderick A Ferguson argue, what we understand in analysing stereotypes is the undercurrent of politics in the group doing the stereotyping. In one example, Ferguson states that assigning 'racial segregation the task of protecting gender and sexual norms […] made miscegenation one of segregation's signal anxieties' (viii). The signal anxiety, or the Freudian concept of anxiety activated in response to external danger, is made more obvious

when Cosette's positive attributes lie in her being associated with a group of women who exist either in a royal harem or at the behest of abusive fathers and husbands (IV,12,iv,904). If we read in this Hugo's desire for the white French woman to take inspiration from these submissive qualities, we understand the signal anxiety of the emasculation of the white man. Hugo tells us that Marius 'did not have to say a word to [Cosette]; she felt the vague, but clear, pressure of his tacit intentions, and blindly complied' (V,9,i,1168). In the face of a new father-in-law who had, once, 'opened a silent war against Marius' (IV,3,vii,739), Marius feels he must assert his lost-masculinity, using 'social damnation as civilized procedure' in preventing Valjean from entering *his* household (V,7,ii,1153). Indeed, in this process, Marius' grandfather begins calling himself Marius' 'slave' (V,5,vi,1108). Cosette, who had once found power when she realised her femininity could be used as a 'weapon' for her own benefit (IV,1,v,733), becomes a tool for the revitalisation of Marius' male pride, and she ends the novel not as her own person but as a possession. Marius feels that by Cosette's side 'he felt himself to be by his property, by his possession, by his despot and his slave' (IV,8,vi,841). Even though the narrator (lovingly) chastises her for choosing her love of her husband over her father, we are told we should not blame her, for 'her soul had so thoroughly become her husband's' (V,9,i,1168) ['sans qu'il y ait à l'en accuser, son âme était tellement devenue celle de son mari' (LM 1227)]. This ending is not one that leaves much space for a particularly aspirational reading of a female character of colour.

It is uncomfortable reading this passage in which Cosette is seemingly overjoyed to have become her husband's property from a white feminist perspective, and this discomfort grows should we read Cosette as a woman of colour, considering how Black personhood is to this day linked to concepts of sexuality. As Owen argues, the stereotypes of Black women,

especially those relating to hypersexuality or passive asexuality were created to rationalise why Black women 'required the disciplining structures of slavery [and] the use of her body as a breeder' (Owen 122). Sharpley-Whiting observed in 1999 that Black women continue to 'remain at the fringes of, or better yet are excluded from, contemporary French literary criticism', which is interesting 'to say the least', given the 'historic French fascination with black female bodies' (3). Indeed, in 1872, Hugo had sex with Céline Alvarez Baa, the Barbadian woman who had brought Hugo's daughter Adèle from Barbados back to her family's care in Paris. In his coded diary of his sexual encounters, he wrote logged the encounter as 'The first Negress in my life', as well as with a 'new hieroglyphic – not one of his most ingenious: a thick capital 'O' resembling a dark hole' (qtd. in Robb 478). Just ten years after the publication of *LM*, Hugo's fascination with this Black female body is embodied in his sexual relationship with it. There is a theoretical reading where we might take the nickname given to Cosette, Mademoiselle Lanoire (III,6,i,579), and transpose on this a theory of racialisation rather than as reference to her black clothing, but I believe that a reading of Cosette as a Black woman in this context is inappropriate given Cosette's enslavement is seen to be a positive factor in their marriage. There are feminist critiques to be made about a white Cosette's status as a possession, but we must also be careful that these do not echo those used by white nineteenth-century women's rights activists who appropriated analogies of slavery in order to argue that 'their rights should come before those of former slaves, and that women's interests would only be hindered by being linked to the demands of black people' (Ware 201).

Stephens suggests that the ending of the novel 'subtly asks' the contemporary reader in 1862 'to ponder what the then-young couple would be doing in the narrator's present day'; whether Marius and Cosette would have taken Valjean's 'legacy of selflessness

forward as the basis of meaningful social change' or if they would have 'supported the

materialist French Second Empire which Hugo so detested' (Stephens 2019, 12-3). While

Stephens argues that the novel favours 'garrets, backstreets, and sewers over the social

mainstream' (referring to the novel's preference for the cheeky gamin over the bourgeoisie)

(2019, 7), thus suggesting that a conclusion that ends in 'financial and emotional security' is

an 'openly questionable' one, we also see in it the desperate attachment of a white male

author to his white female character. Cosette's ability to live into a happy ending takes the

death of Hugo's daughter and transforms it:

> unlike in the story of Léopoldine, [in *LM*] it is not the daughter who perishes shortly
>
> after the wedding, but the father. Through the wish-fulfillment of fiction, Hugo
>
> blesses his daughter's love, gives his life in his daughter's place, and allows her to live
>
> on in the love and prosperity of bourgeois married life (Lewis 2015, 17).

Though the novel's ending does leave ample room for a reader to ponder the newlyweds'

ascension into their new life, it also grants them a leniency in this openness. Unlike Valjean,

who sees himself doubled in the enslaved prisoner, Marius sends his money abroad

(knowing it will be used to purchase enslaved people) and cannot feel its repercussions, only

reap its benefits. The novel does not emphasise any colonial guilt about this transaction,

despite Hugo's previous pro-abolition message. Yee uses the work of Orlando Patterson to

argue that it is the slaveowner, 'not the metropolitan bourgeois', who experiences 'his own

freedom fully' because of the slaveowner's proximity to the enslaved: the slaveowner is able

to accumulate 'honour' in proportion to his slaves' *loss* of honour (Yee 2016, 76, emphasis

hers). This transfer of white, colonial guilt from the bourgeois funder of the slave trade

(Marius) to that of the plantation owner (Thénardier) is only able to happen because of the

investment opportunity created by Cosette's coming into Marius' property. Dishonour, as embodied by the continued trafficking of enslaved people, is distanced from the Parisian protagonist Marius and placed squarely on the non-French, *barbaric* Thérnadier via Cosette's white femininity. By 'saving' her reputation and buying Thérnadier's silence, Marius is able to square this fundamentally *dishonourable* investment, prioritising their white, bourgeois safety over the lives of those Thérnadier will go on to enslave. Marius and Cosette do not need to answer for their use of inheritance in the slave trade because Hugo's reticent guilt over his deceased daughter is traded for an eternity in a fictional happily-ever-after.

Thus, when we do a reading of Cosette as categorically *white,* not as 'default' but on purpose, we unsilence Hugo's misappropriation of the language of slavery in his white female characters. Grossman argues that although Cosette's lack of latter-day autonomy may appear to be 'merely slavish' to our 'modern sensibilities', this could also be interpreted 'as an attempt to *be*, metaphorically, the other. Unlike the poor, whose identities are eroded and confused, lovers gain an enhanced sense of self when they identify with each other' (1994, 310). In this, Cosette *gains* power in her conjoining with her white husband. As Savy and Lewis both observe, Cosette 'lives on at the expense of others' early demise', Savy even naming Cosette someone who is 'nourrie d'argent, de chair et de mort' ['*fed on money, flesh and death'*], which Lewis translates as 'vampire' (Savy 182-3; Lewis 2015, 12). Similarly, Grossman observes that happiness 'gluts its possessors, dulling their compassion for others and turning them from loftier goals' (Grossman 1994, 228). Hugo is adamant to allow his daughter a life in death no matter the cost, and we know that this cost is the continued enslavement of Black people. His priority of her happiness over the novel's demand for an end in 'social asphyxia' (preface, xlv) upholds white supremacist bourgeois

ideology. To name Cosette as a happy vampire is thus a form of decolonisation, as we refuse to allow the continuation of the mythic ideal of white, female innocence and understand the relationships built in her presence through the very real presence of race and gender.

MIXED-RACE MARIUS PONTMERCY

In our interview, Gabe mentioned how one of the only times he had ever felt like he had experienced racial euphoria when reading a fanfiction was surprising to him:

> [the fic] caught me off-guard because [Marius] went up to Feuilly and he was like "hey, I know you like you speak Spanish, and my [father] is actually from Guatemala," and I saw Guatemala and was like, "oh my God!" I was so pleasantly surprised, because [usually] Latin Americans come from Mexico, or Brazil, or Puerto Rico, and I was like "Guatemala?! You know Guatemala?! Hold on a second!" Right, so, and there was this whole thing about […] Marius' grandfather, who was like, part of one of the Industries that was exploiting in Guatemala, and how Marius came to be […] out of a fling with one of the [workers] there, and how his grandfather didn't let [Marius] speak Spanish through his whole life, and he wanted to reconnect with that, […] I honestly don't care about Marius a lot, […] but when I saw that I was like […] "wow, this character could have so much depth to him!"

Gabe notes several points that made this fanfiction special to him: 1) the specificity of the character being Guatemalan, a lesser-represented Latin American country in Western media, 2) the overcoming of racial-specific discrimination from Marius' grandfather (including the denial of language and the commentary of US American exploitation), and 3) that it was Marius not one of the Barricade boys who had this racialisation placed on them.

In the fic, Marius nervously states how uncomfortable he is with admitting his lack of Spanish-speaking skills: "It's ironic, I guess, I'm basically fluent in German, and I've studied French and Latin, but I never took any Spanish. I guess I never really thought about being, um, Latino." Brought up in a white household that encouraged assimilation with the intent to deny Marius his non-white heritage, Marius hesitates before stating his being Latino, possibly due to both the internalised racism and the unwillingness to appropriate a cultural identity he was not brought up in. Feuilly was raised in a Dominican household as a child but calls both himself and Marius "rootless". This companionable comparison is rare within the fandom: while Marius has familial issues, this comes from political difference within the same (white) racial bracket. Feuilly is, on the other hand, often codified as being Latin American in fanfiction because he is canonically one of the only Ami in the novel who is a worker not a student:

> Feuilly was a fan-maker, an orphan on both sides, who worked his fingers to the bone for his three francs a day and whose sole thought was to save the world. He had one other worry: to teach himself, which he also described as saving himself. […] He did not want there to be a single person on earth without a motherland. […] In this inner circle of young utopians, specifically focused on France, he represented the outside world (III,4,i,539).

A factory worker paid very little, he is characterised by Hugo as having a strong work ethic, a multi-cultural perspective and as being a representative of those outside of France, which fans parallel with Latinx immigrants to the United States. What is novel for fans like Gabe is a fanfiction that presents not *just* the overworked, underpaid, globalised Feuilly as being of colour but also the traditionally *white* romantic lead Marius.

The fic is not, of course, utopic. This scenario, where a rich white woman bears the repressed child of a poor, foreign member of the house staff (especially one who is an outdoor labourer) is a common trope in colonial fiction. However, the racial discrimination faced by such mixed-race partners and their children is still a reality, and the reflection of it in this fic is not necessarily a negative one. Crucially, Marius does not become Latino in this fic because of a shared skin colour or country of birth with Feuilly, but because of his self-conscious desire to re-learn a language denied to him (this language itself having its own complicated, colonial history). Marius notes the irony that he was allowed to learn other European languages because in the context of his white, upper-class household, French and Latin are specifically *white* languages, but was denied Spanish because of how it is perceived to belong to the lower-class Guatemalan house-staff like his father. Marius has, to this point, been able to ignore social ties outside of his insular white familial group, and it is only once he seeks to create these new connections that he begins to feel racial euphoria. As he practises with Feuilly, we see his lingual confidence grow at the same pace as his blossoming connection to his father:

"*¿Cuál piso?* " Feuilly asked, motioning to the [elevator] buttons.

" *Uno*." Marius grinned.

"*¿De dónde eres?* " Feuilly tried next.

"*De* . . . Virginia?"

"*Muy bien. ¿Y tu papá, de dónde es?* "

"*Mi papá . . . es?--es . . . de Guatemala.* " Marius's smile filled his face.[67]

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[67] This exchange is left untranslated in the fic, perhaps so that a reader that speaks Spanish shares the pleasure of understanding with Marius, thus gaining a privileged experience of the work that a non-Spanish speaker (like the previously undereducated Marius) does not, and so I respect that decision here.

After praise and re-assurance, Feuilly asks Marius a question he has never answered truthfully before, in his father's language, and when he replies that his father is Guatemalan, Marius feels a simple, euphoric joy. What is euphoric about this portrayal for fans like Gabe is that the fic explores the community link that is created when Marius is allowed to see himself as Latino, and the bond created when two people support one another to find joy in what they share in their identities.

MARIUS AND DUMAS

This joy is a translation of the canonical journey that Marius goes through in Hugo's novel, discovering that his father is not the 'swashbuckler' that does 'not love him' as he has been taught (III,3,4,516), and that he was not abandoned through choice but out of desperation (III,3,vi,521). Marius' father, Colonel Georges Pontmercy is a:

> man of about fifty [...] weathered by the sun, his face almost black and his hair almost white, with a large scar across his forehead that ran on down his cheek, bent, buckled, old before his time (III,3,ii,506)

Hugo notes that Georges is suntanned from working outside, making him look 'almost' black ['presque noire' (LM 544)]. As noted above in analysis of Valjean, the roots of the term 'Ethiopian' and the conceptualisation of Black Africans in Western thought are based in the Greek 'sunburnt' (Miller 1985, 23). Georges embodies the dark outsider, the foreign, the person who Gillenormand believes tainted his daughter, Marius' unnamed mother, who is 'a charming soul attracted by all that is bright, interested in flowers, poetry, and music, off with the fairies in glorious places, enthusiastic, ethereal' (III,2,viii,501). Gillenormand forcefully orphans Marius after his mother's death, blackmailing Georges into giving up his

son in exchange for Marius' financial safety. Hugo tells us that Marius 'would have been the pride and joy of the colonel in his loneliness; but the grandfather had imperiously claimed his grandson' (III,3,ii,509) ['eût été la joie du colonel dans sa solitude ; mais l'aïeul avait impérieusement réclamé son petit-fils' (LM 547)]. Gillenormand is categorically *imperial* here: he is a patriarch of an ambitious French family, and yet he believes his empire will fail should his only male heir not repress the unwanted outside-influence. Yee argues of a similar plotline in *Bug-Jargal,*

> Hugo's orphaned narrator is confronted with his uncle, a figure of the bad father, who is a cruel slave-owner in Haiti, while the eponymous Bug-Jargal has a glorious paternal lineage [...] it is tempting to read here a conflict between a true noble paternal line and the debased lineage of the vicious uncle, knowing that Hugo's maternal grandfather was a slave-trader. [... In this work] the 'good father' or positive paternal lineage is linked to an exotic figure [...] through whom the young male protagonist is indirectly linked to an older, more pre-modern order (Yee 2008, 8).

Though not one for one, and written at a period where Hugo was a 'young monarchist' (Yee 2008 10), we can read in Marius, Georges and Gillenormand's relationship something of Bug-Jargal's: where the maternal grandfather[68] (though not explicitly a slave-trader) situates the masculine, violent Black man against the feminine, artistic white French woman: a relic of an old order. Georges, who is regal if not royal, becomes a noble savage, racialised in his being Othered by the white bourgeois family, for being foreign, dark, and strange.

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[68] Hugo's own maternal grandfather 'had spent most of his life sailing from Nantes to the West Indies, filling up with slaves at West African ports on the way out, and returning with sugar and molasses' (Robb 1998, 4).

Gillenormand's daughter has thus failed both in her physical reproductive capacity to maintain white purity, but also her symbolic and gatekeeping ability: having died in childbirth, she has not been able to transmit the 'principles' of the Gillenormand empire on to the next generation, the roles played by and assigned to white women in a white supremacist society as tracked by Ware. It is thus left to the grandfather to keep back the 'ever-encroaching and disrespectful black man at all costs', which he is ultimately incapable of doing (Ware 38).

The life of Georges Pontmercy parallels, to some degree, that of Thomas-Alexandre Dumas, the eighteenth century General of mixed heritage.[69] As Reiss notes, in Dumas' early teen years the Police des Noirs laws were supplemented by two orders, one of which forbade '"white" subjects from marrying "blacks, mulattos, or people of color"'. Two years later in 1780, 'the king issued a new law prohibiting people of color from using the titles Sieur or Dame ("Sir" or "Madame").' While Thomas-Alexandre remained a count, he could not 'use "Sir" before his name without risking arrest' (Reiss 69). Thomas-Alexandre chose to refer to himself by his mother's surname Dumas rather than by his father's, Davy de la Pailleterie, allying himself not to his white, French nobleman father but to Marie-Cessette Dumas, his enslaved mother. According to Reiss, Thomas-Alexandre's father prevented him from using his birth name because, due to race laws, Thomas-Alexandre could not enlist in the army as an officer despite his noble title. Thomas-Alexandre thus enlisted as a non-officer, which would have besmirched the noble name of his father (Reiss 91). Even after leaving the military, Thomas-Alexandre continued to refer to himself as simply Alex Dumas to the end of his life.

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[69] Dumas' mixed heritage has only recently begun to receive critical attention, and as far as I'm aware, Reiss is the only person to have published an extensive biography in English hence my reliance on this singular source.

A substantial aspect of Georges Pontmercy's character is that he 'never missed an opportunity to sign himself Colonel Baron Pontmercy', even when this caused political and prosecutorial trouble (III,3,ii,508). His son Marius chooses to stubbornly call himself Baron Pontmercy after his father, even going so far as to have calling cards printed for himself with the new name, the discovery of which is the breaking point for his relationship with his grandfather Luc-Esprit Gillenormand (III,3,vi,524). Though this title change is a reflection of a change in political alliance from Monarchist to Bonapartist, a Black Marius' declaration that the name change 'means that I'm my father's son' (III,3,viii,531) echoes the sentiment of both the fanfiction Marius, who says 'my father is from Guatamala' with pride, and with author Alexandre Dumas père, who chose to honour his father and grandmother by taking the name Dumas over opting to use the legal surname passed to him through his Marquis grandfather.

Alex Dumas was never awarded the Légion d'Honneur. Claude Ribbe, political activist and writer asks: 'Why did General Dumas not get the Legion of Honor? […] Every revolutionary general got one! […] Racism, racism, racism' (qtd. In Reiss 329). Hugo tells us that Georges Pontmercy 'had only an old blue coat and never went out without pinning on it the rosette of an officer of the Légion d'Honneur', even though he is told that doing so is illegal (III,3,ii,508). Hugo, sometimes-friend-sometimes-enemy of Alexandre Dumas *pére* (Bellos 169) and *fils,* could be choosing to honour the late Thomas-Alexandre: awarding Colonel/General Pontmercy/Dumas his rightful Légion d'Honneur while lamenting the treatment of mixed-race Black men like him under Napoleon's race laws. Two weeks after Napoleon created the Légion d'Honneur in 1802, 'Napoleon issued a law banning all officers and soldiers of color who had retired or been discharged from the army from living in Paris and the surrounding area' (Reiss 314). General Dumas required special dispensation to be

allowed 'to stay in his own house in Villers-Cotterêtes' (Reiss 315). When Marius is told to visit his father, he begrudgingly travels out of Paris for the first time, alone, to Vernon (of a similar distance north of Paris as Villers-Cotterêtes, though to the West rather than the East), where his father's house (and subsequent grave) are located. He is only able to travel to see his father because of the dispensation Gillenormand allows him.

While of course this reading is rooted in the assumption that whiteness equates to status, culture and money (Moffitt 2020, 68), and that a Black bloodline would be seen as undesirable, unlike the reading of Cosette as Black, we can see in this reading a mixed-race Black Marius desiring to break his connection to the bigoted, and to the literal embodiment of old-fashioned white supremacy, as epitomised by Gillenormand, who was 'one of those men who have become a curiosity solely because they have lived a long while, and who are odd because once upon a time they looked like everyone else and now they don't look like anyone' (III,2,i,494). Gillenormand compares white Frenchness to the savage 'other' in his attempts to get Marius on-side, telling his grandson that:

> '"Nature," he would say, "offers civilization even the most hilariously barbaric specimens, so that it may have a bit of everything. Europe has samples from Asia and Africa, but in a smaller format. The Opéra danseuses are rose-pink cannibals. They don't eat men, they bleed them dry. Or, rather, those little enchantresses turn them into oysters and swallow them whole. The Carribbeans leave nothing but the bones, [opera] dancers leave nothing but the shells. Such are our customs. We don't devour, we gnaw; we don't exterminate, we claw to death' (III,2,i,495).

Gillenormand argues that the 'civilised' white and European is less extreme than the 'barbaric' foreign. While the French dancer may eat the oyster raw, this is not the same

violence enacted by the 'savage' abroad. In her comparison of Powell's 1968 *Rivers of Blood* speech with *The Old People of Lambeth*, a pamphlet published by the Salisbury Group in 1982, Ware states that in 'both these examples of racist imagery the combination of old age and femininity works to convey the powerlessness and physical frailty of a white community threatened by the barbarism of the unwanted black 'immigrants' who neither understand nor have respect for the values of civilisation' (Ware, 5). In a similar fashion, Gillenormand specifically evokes the dainty and the white in his evocation of the *danseuses de l'Opéra* because they, unlike the Caribbeans are embodiments of ephemerality, not violence. This kind of discourse is common in Marius' childhood, as is indicated by the preceding statement that 'one of [Gillenormand's] favourite sayings' while sitting by the fireplace was about '*Nature'* (III,2,i,495). This repetition is, as Shaheen argues, a teaching tool (Shaheen 172). Marius, whose education comes from his grandfather, repeats the message: to be white and French is good, to be foreign is bad.

Yet despite this forceful assimilation, when Marius thinks of his father after he has broken from the indoctrination of his youth, he thinks of the soldier who 'left on all Europe's fields of victory drops of that same blood that he, Marius, had in his veins [...] and who, twenty years later, had come back from the great wars with his cheek scarred, a smile on his face, unaffected, at peace, admirable, as pure of heart as a child, having given his all for France and done nothing against her' (IV,13,iii,923). Marius feels connection to his father through the blood they share – something he is now *proud* of, as well as desiring his father's bravery, fearlessness and ability to *smile:* at peace with himself and his actions. Marius feels a profound sense of embarrassment when he believes he is failing his father's memory, this once-foreign ancestor becoming his moral and political core. Marius regrets his ill-education

while his father was alive, but vows to make sure he does well by the Colonel's ghost

(IV,13,iii,924), a decision to see pride in his Black ancestry, not shame.

TRANS!PONINE

Éponine has been read through multiple feminist perspectives that argue her crossdressing

as a man in order to participate on the barricades is commendable on Hugo's part, as it

begins to nuance stereotypical portrayals of womanhood. Gasiglia-Laster sees Éponine's

male disguise as Hugo contributing to 'the destruction of a traditional cultural image of

femininity' (173), and that this is Hugo purposefully arguing for female equality. Lewis

echoes this by stating that Éponine's dressing as a man 'models a different strategy for

accessing agency' to those used by characters like Cosette and Fantine because Éponine

belongs to an excluded class that can challenge the 'social order' through her outright

rejection of authority (2016, 70; 76). Stephens also agrees that Fantine and Éponine both

'exhibit greater agency than Cosette and constitute different lines of attack on a social

system that Hugo criticizes for being at once sexist and materialist' (2019, 7). Each of these

readings highlight the unusual (and thus gratifying) sense of selfhood Éponine is able to earn

for herself in the novel through her gendered identity and that, radically, this does not

necessarily place *masculinity* as inherently more useful and/or desirable than femininity.

Gasiglia-Laster notes how the 'moment Éponine reveals a courage that is usually

attributed to men, she claims it for herself as a woman, and as a woman who fears nothing

(167). Importantly, as Gasiglia-Laster claims, Hugo does not disregard Éponine's

womanhood in order for her to achieve a state of heroism, and she dies as a woman who

has been heroic. Both Lewis and Gasiglia-Laster begin to break down the idea of a 'binary'

between a traditional view of 'feminine' versus 'masculine' traits, and Stephens also

attempts to push against the traditional view of 'gender essentialism' by rejecting the common portrayal of Cosette as simply being a feminine to compare Éponine's non-conformity to (Stephens 2019, 3). There are however several specifically transgender readings to be done to further these gendered critiques. In reading the characters of the novel as transgender, we can continue to break down what traits are assigned to male and female characters, analysing what is perceived to be objective, biological fact. While all people have complex relationships to gender that goes beyond a simplified cisgender/transgender binary, in purposefully reading the characters as transgender we can access layers of history, language and perception of gender that intersect with race, class and disability to create the lens of the 'other'.

In her discussion of the novel's Éponine, Gasiglia-Laster mentions Victor Margueritte's *La Garçonne,* where 'women wishing to emancipate themselves adopted a slender androgynous figure and wore trousers to be provocative' in imitation of the film (173). This same desire to imitate a film for gendered emancipation can be seen in the fans of the 2012 Hollywood *LM* adaptation, where Éponine uses bandages to bind her chest as part of her male disguise. Witnessing this chest-binding, an element not depicted in the stage musical or in the novel, one trans tumblr user recalls how they had watched the film as a young teenager and thought 'hey….. that's a pretty good idea' (@birf), stating that they had gone home and immediately attempted to mimic the binding style. Because fans 'create strong parallels between their own lives and the events' of their chosen text (Jenkins 278), this gave rise to self-attested 'Public Service Announcements' (as posted by tumblr user @shitpostingfromthebarricade) where users warned their transmasculine fellows not to mimic Éponine in using bandages, instead directing them towards safer binding practises. For these fans, this use of disguise went beyond the novel's female Éponine wearing

trousers to look like a 'sort of young workman' (IV,11,vi,888), or the stage musical's use of a

large hat to wind her long hair into, towards an interpretation of a person who wishes to

physically modify their body to exist in a more comfortable gender presentation and gave

rise to the popular headcanon of Éponine being in some way genderqueer[70]: sometimes a

butch dyke (where these terms are a deliberate political and aesthetic identity),[71] sometimes

a non-binary or genderfluid person, and occasionally a transgender man.

For other transgender fans, Éponine's male disguise is sometimes seen as a

transgender allegory, occasionally without the specific desire to interpret her character as

being *actually* transgender. One tumblr user states that they 'should have realized' they

were non-binary when they 'got super excited' to see Éponine bind her chest and '[pass]

perfectly' because of it; but notes that they believe Éponine is a 'cis girl' who 'just dresses

up to participate in the revolution' (@nonbinarykilljoy). In their analysis of transgender

performance, Kemp raises the idea that in Shakespeare gender can be changed through 'the

magical transvestism of "the pants"', and that this gender change is 'instant and absolute'

(Kemp 38).[72] Éponine's identity is similar: in wearing trousers, those who know her are

unable to see beyond this new gender identity including Valjean (IV,9,i,855), Marius

(IV,14,iv,933), Cosette (IV,4,vii,940), and Courfeyrac (IV,11,vi,888). Éponine 'passes' as the

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[70] For examples, the search term "trans Éponine" can be used to search tumblr and AO3:
https://www.tumblr.com/search/trans%20eponine ;
https://archiveofourown.org/tags/Trans%20Éponine/works (Accessed 6 April 2022).
[71] From "Usage Note For Dyke": 'The terms dyke and bull dyke are used with disparaging intent and are perceived as insulting. However, they have been adopted as positive terms of self-reference by young or radical lesbians and in the academic community.'
[72] While writing *LM*, Hugo was haunted by the spirits of the literary past who encouraged him to 'Finish *Les Misérables*, great man'. One of these ghosts was Shakespeare, who returned 'night after night' to make changes 'line by line' to his works in progress (Robb 1998, 334; 337). Hugo's essay *William Shakespeare* was initially a short introduction to his son's translation of the plays that came in the immediate aftermath of LM. Robb argues it was an auto-aggrandising biography of Hugo himself more than a biography of the playwright (Robb 1998, 400), but perhaps shows how interlinked the plays of Shakespeare were in Hugo's conceptualisation of *LM*.

gender she is presenting herself as and is accepted unquestioningly until she voluntarily

drops the disguise to be recognised by Marius, which Kemp says is 'incoherent with the

experience of anyone attempting to transition today' (37). Kemp, using Bornstein's 1994

Hidden: A Gender argues that for a trans person 'gender exists as a component of social

relationships as well as a facet of interiority, to the extent that a shift or transition on one

end of the relationship changes the nature of the relationship itself'. As well as a

relationship change, Kemp also points to how, unlike a Shakespearean crossdressing play,

'passing' in contemporary reality comes with 'stakes and rules' (39), where 'discovery is fatal

and stealth is a virtue' (40).[73] There could be some argument here that Éponine, the isolated

and tragic figure desperate to create relations with those outside of her family does not

have solid-enough relationships where Valjean, Cosette, Courfeyrac or, most crucially, her

crush/neighbour/friend Marius can see through her disguise – thus no matter how blatantly

she breaks the rules, there are no stakes to being caught. At no point, for example, is her

disguise threatened through discovery by her familial relations, and so we cannot know how

those who know her intimately would perceive her: whether Éponine would be subjected to

a transgender 'goodbye' from her parents (Kemp 39), or, in a more hopeful reading,

whether she would be accepted in her male identity by her similarly outcast younger

siblings.

I argue that the escapist fantasy for a non-binary person like @nonbinarykilljoy is not

despite the 'magic pants' reality of 'passing' without damaging their relationships and falling

foul to transphobic violence or hatred, but because of it. The gender euphoria comes not

from reading the character as canonically non-binary but from Éponine's treatment in

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[73] Kemp states in their work that the contemporary perspective of transgender experience is an 'American' one that is located on blogs like Art of Transliness and internet forums.

society, which is deemed more of a euphoric experience than the user's own contemporary

reality. This may be more relevant for a non-binary fan, where 'passing' becomes more

complex. Éponine and the Shakespearean women-dressed-as-men before her embody a

simpler view of 'passing', in which a woman becomes a man through the power of the magic

disguise. In the r/NonBinary thread in Reddit, non-binary people discuss "What does passing

mean to you as an enby". The question asker reveals a sense of anxiety about not fitting into

structured concepts of 'passing' due to their *not binary* gender:

> I don't feel like I personally can ever really "pass" as an enby, because so many
>
> people still think in such a binary way. I can't imagine someone on the street seeing
>
> me and thinking, "oh, that's a nonbinary person." I feel like the best I can hope for is
>
> someone seeing me and thinking, "Oh, I'm not sure which of the two binary genders
>
> that person is" (@Mobile_Reputation_52).

Other users on the thread point to their gender euphoria coming from people's confusion: 'I

pass when I meet a certain level of androgyny so people double take', 'people looking a bit

confused and awkward and not really calling me either of those "polite" words

[sir/madam]'. For others, they are working to move beyond others' perception of

themselves: 'I am trying to worry less about passing, overall. I'm working on making my

identity less tied to my outward appearance', 'I'm just being me', 'I don't really want to

"pass". I just want to be comfortable as myself'. While the very concept of 'passing' is a

complicated one that Kemp rightly argues has often been collapsed with duplicity (37), and

has a largely racial history (Schrank 19; Florini 5.2-4; Moffitt 68), I argue that

@nonbinarykilljoy finds the power of a transgender Éponine in her magic and 'absolute'

ability to change her gender in the minds of those who perceive her. Éponine can choose

what gender she is, and the omnipotent narrator confirms that those around her do not

doubt her self-defined identity. Her status as a comfort character in fandom comes,

therefore, in the reduction of doubt that those who surround her question the gender she

identifies as. Unlike the Reddit users, Éponine does not need to 'imagine' a society that does

not gender her as an 'other'.

NON-HUMAN NON-BINARY

There is a pervasive trope in recent media termed 'non-human non-binary' ("Non Human

Non Binary", *TV Tropes*), in which non-binary people and characters are predominantly cast

as non-human beings like aliens, monsters and robots. This is sometimes 'used as a way of

avoiding including genuine non-binary representation, or (worse) as a way to intentionally

dehumanise non-binary people', especially by cisgender writers with the desire to other or

to fetishize (*TV Tropes*). Piers Morgan argues in one (likely intentionally derogative) opinion

blog that it would be 'ridiculous' to be handed a new-born child and to have the nurse

declare it a 'non-binary, gender fluid creature of indeterminate sexuality' (2017). Morgan

here uses the word 'creature' with negative implications, turning the hypothetical normal

human baby into a transgender monster as part of his ongoing capitalisation of moral

outrage against transgender people. Essayist Eden M-W calls this 'mass dehumanisation',

where the (often unintentional) message transferred is "Yeah, you exist. But you're not

people" (QueerBuccaneer). Eden cites Bugs Bunny who is often gender-fluid during

moments of explicit sexualisation and *The Good Place'*s artificial intelligence Janet as two

examples where non-binary non-humans are often ostracised as an Other against the

human majority of their world who fit into neat, binary, gender categories. This trope is not

only endemic in contemporary media portrayals of non-binary peoples, but can be traced to the racialisation of gender, which suffuses the language of *LM*.

Each member of the Thénardier family has a moment as a creature: the first time we meet them they are playing on chains that remind us of 'monsters' like Polyphemus and Caliban (I,iv,i,123), Gavroche finds a home living peaceably with a horde of rats (IV,6,ii,793) inside the belly of the monument of an elephant colossus (IV,6,ii,785), the family lives in a 'rathole' that is 'dirty, fetid, putrid, dark, sordid' (III,7,vi,613), full of 'spiders', 'woodlice' and 'human monsters' (III,8,vi,614). When Cosette is amongst them, she is a 'hummingbird amongst toads' (III,7,x,624). Éponine and her sister Azelma are repeatedly referred to as being 'creatures' (III,7,iv,606; 608; VI,9,i,855; IV,14,vii,938). Éponine especially is 'sad and emaciated' (III,8,iv,606), 'ghastly' (606), a 'wild animal' (IV,2,iii,715), a 'bitch […] the daughter of a dog' (IV,8,iv,837), a 'bat', a 'devil', a 'spirit', and a 'goblin' (IV,2,iii,716). Hugo tells us that girls in poverty like her are:

> Sad creatures, without name, without age, without sex, already beyond good and evil, emerging from childhood into the world already stripped of everything, with neither liberty, nor virtue, nor any responsibility left (III,8,iv,608).

Left here, especially in the English translation, there would be a clearly monstrous, non-human non-binary slant to this treatment of Éponine, where 'without sex' is associated with the negative: the goblin, the ghoul, the ghastly. However, as well as older connotations in the word of women who engage in sex work (work in which it is implied Éponine is exploited (Lewis 2015 11)), *Larousse* defines 'créature' as a being 'Être créé, par opposition à Dieu qui l'a créé' ['Who has been created, as opposed to a creation of God'], and 'Tout être imaginaire, […] créé par un inventeur, un artiste' ['Any imaginary being […] created by an

inventor, an artist'] ("créature", *Larousse*). These definitions that see a *créature* as being

dream-like lend themselves to a euphoric reading, in which a transgender person is work of

art, with the power and authority to invent themselves in any form they desire. While these

are categorically *negative* descriptions, our perception of 'vermin' shifts when we see the

humanity of the rat and the toad. As Stryker encourages in the reclamation of the 'creature'

and the 'monster':

> By embracing and accepting them, even piling one on top of another, we may dispel
>
> their ability to harm us. […] The affront you humans take at being called a "creature"
>
> results from the threat the term poses to your status as "lords of creation," [… it]
>
> suggests the lack or loss of a superior personhood (Stryker 240).

Valjean tells his village that the concept of a 'weed' is a human fabrication designed to

designate what is of use and what is useless to society (I,5,iii,139), what has status and what

is superior. In a similar fashion, rats, toads, and creatures are *made* monsters because of

how they inconvenience humanity. With the rise in non-binary and bigender creators like

Steven Universe's Rebecca Sugar and *She-Ra and the Princess of Power*'s ND Stevenson, the

trope of non-human non-binary has begun being appropriated as part of the reclamation of

the monster for queer and disabled people. In one of the earliest pieces of published

academic transgender criticism, Stryker finds a 'deep affinity' between herself as a

'transexual woman' and *Frankenstein*'s monster:

> Like the monster, I am too often perceived as less than fully human due to the
>
> means of my embodiment; like the monster's as well, my exclusion from human
>
> community fuels a deep and abiding rage in me that I, like the monster, direct
>
> against the conditions in which I must struggle to exist (238).

Thompson also undertakes the task of reclaiming the term 'monster' for disabled people as a cultural and political act, stating that it is a term 'whose inherent negativity masks a positive set of meanings which can only be explored once the word is owned and used differently' (106). We understand in these models that people are monstered by society through the treatment of the oppressive group, not because those being monstered are *inherently* bad or lesser. In these narratives the creature becomes more human than the humans surrounding them: displaying more empathy, communal spirit and agency, especially in spite of typically white, cisgender and patriarchal antagonists. For these non-binary people, the aspiration is the gender freedom of non-humanity, which sits in tension with relating to the struggle of wanting to be treated humanely. As Nordmarken states of his own experiences: 'My embodied, affective resistance is human, more human than violent eyes. They are inhuman in their inhumane-ness, their unhuman performativity and performance' (Nordmarken 41). Lewis too argues that Éponine's ability to reclaim her selfhood comes from her rejection of human coherency: by becoming other than human, she 'transcends earthly power dynamics' (Lewis 2016, 76). In a reclaimed non-human non-binary reading, Éponine being described as a 'creature' *elevates* her to non-binary status where she can access a trans humanity: like Stryker, we can read in her not a 'fall from the grace' of inhumane cisgender society but a person who roars 'gleefully away from it' (Stryker 239).

GENDERED RACE AND THE THÉNARDIERS

While this re-appropriation of the creature is a euphoric reading, the racialisation of the Thénardiers as discussed in Chapter One must be taken into account when considering their gender. Rigid, taxonomical beliefs about 'masculine' and 'feminine' as enshrined in concepts

of 'male' and 'female' were part of a colonial desire to differentiate white races from non-white 'barbarity' (Redman 16). As Waldron points out in her critique of environmental racism in Nova Scotia, policymakers and institutions have placed environmental hazards like landfills and incinerators near 'African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, and the working poor' because 'they are perceived as trash' and 'associated with filth, waste and uncleanliness' (Waldron 13; 9). Ideas about race and gender are 'critical in reinforcing – and sometimes deconstructing – basic cultural conceptions regarding humanity' (Redman 8), especially used against Black and Indigenous peoples to create a sense of hierarchy where white peoples' binary concepts of gender are perceived as superior (Schuller 37; Saini 75; Moffitt 66; Ferguson 6).

In response to a tweet joking that trans men love to self-describe themselves as 'dirty bug boy' in their social media bios, Jackson King, a Black transmasculine journalist, argues that this is a specifically white phenomenon, stating that: 'White trans men love calling themselves "rat" / "sloth" / "garbage monster" / some other undesirable creature and I can't relate lol'. User @EdelaneyDenice agrees in a reply stating: 'Only a people who aren't used to being compared to animals willingly would eh?'. King and @EdelaneyDenice make clear here that there is an inherently white element to the fondness for self-describing as 'trash', where the stakes for playfully identifying as 'trash' are different for those who are white and those who are not. For a white transmasculine person, a self-identification with dirt and uncleanliness may be their first (self-created) association with being made inhuman. Unlike a non-white person, this undesirability is not because of a cultural stereotype, institutionalised and weaponised by an external force to dehumanise their race as part of the colonial toolkit (Miller 1985, 29). Nordmarken and Stryker, who both proclaim monstrosity 'as a tool of resistance and reconnection' (Nordmarken 37) are both white

critics who, while acknowledging their racial identity being privileges to their conceptualisation of the monstrous, find an attachment to the term 'creature' that King does not.

As Chen argues, gender is a perception 'of bodily material at the threshold between the self and social world', which is the target for 'policing, regulation, and rehabilitation' in the negating attempt to 'incorporate communities of color into the national body' (Chen 16). The fact that the Thénardiers, who are most often compared to Black and Native American peoples (IV,6,ii,780; V,9,iv,1176) as well as constructed as mixed-race by those like Grossman (1994, 36) and Rose are also those who exhibit non-gender conforming traits remains a factor of which we must remain aware. Thénardier wears 'a woman's chemise' that exposes 'his hairy chest' (III,8,vi,615), his wife is a 'butcher's boy dressed up as a girl' (II,3,ii,316), Éponine has the 'broken, strangled, rasping' voice of a male 'galley slave' (III,8,iv,606-7), and Gavroche is a 'mother' (IV,6,ii,790) as he adopts his 'little girls' (his biological brothers (IV,6,ii,778)),[74] housing them in his Inuit-style tent (IV,6,ii,789).[75] These depictions fit into the 'relentless' and 'elaborate caricatures of the androgyny of non-white and poor peoples' which Schuller describes as biopolitical ideas created in the nineteenth century. These caricatures were designed to prove that 'Anglo-Saxons, at the top of the evolutionary ladder, possessed the most highly differentiated physical, mental, and psychological profiles' (Schuller 59), and that those who are not seen to conform are *scientifically* proven to be lesser beings. The creation of these 'images' and 'institutions' produced and sustained 'the illusion of realism, of absolute truth, thereby effecting [white]

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[74] Rose translates Hugo's «Momacques, venex avec moi » (LM 822) as 'Little girls, come with me' (778), choosing to lean into a feminine that is more neutral in the Hugo.
[75] Hugo uses a slur and so is replaced.

mastery of otherness' (Sharpley-Whiting 6). Grossman states that Éponine and Azelma

especially are part of a 'species that repeats their parents' mongrelization', arguing that

there is a blurring of distinct genders in these children (Grossman 1994, 36). As Hugo

himself says, 'a civilizing people must remain a virile people. […] Those who become

effeminate become degenerate. […] Races petrified in dogma or demoralized by lucre are

unfit to lead civilization' (V,1,xx,1017). Here, Hugo confirms that the effeminate, racialised

Thénardier and his genderfluid family are in opposition to the beauty of the ideal form: the

white, cisgender French society. This effeminate Thénardier is unable to create a normative

family, and the effect on his children 'cannot be underestimated. [...] Far from protecting

[Éponine] and molding her into the social ideal of femininity' (Gasiglia-Laster 166), the

feminine father warps the masculine daughter. In Éponine especially, the description of her

voice as a galley slave's 'masculinize her voice, not only removing it from the body of a

young woman, but also removing any trace of that body from the voice, producing a near-

total separation between her voice and any potential object of sexual desire' (Lewis 2015,

17). As the maligned, losing party in the romantic triangle between the bourgeoise,

heteronormative Marius/Cosette couple, Éponine's non-white racialisation, non-cis gender

and non-bourgeoise class combine into the *disfigured* non-human non-binary. Gasiglia-

Laster, for instance, argues in a section titled 'The Impossibility of Being Loved – is Éponine

another Quasimodo?' that though Éponine 'sometimes appears beautiful, she personifies

the same rejected misery as the hunchback, since wretchedness often provokes disgust,

being disagreeable to see' (166). Here, Éponine becomes attached to non-white race and

'disgust'-worthy disability through her proximity to Quasimodo, the disabled, Rromani

bellringer through their shared segregation from cisheteronormative sexual appeal.

For those of differing racial, cultural and contextual experiences, gendered catharsis

may come from associating their gender identity with the monstrous, and for others there is nothing to be gained from reclamation of the term. Some trans fans may desire to see works of fanfiction deal with social and economic marginalization common to trans people like 'family rejection, discrimination, poverty' (Ledbetter #1.7), and others do not. There is no *right* way to do a non-binary reading, but racialisation must be taken into consideration while doing so to avoid re-building the implicit assumption that being a white, binary, cisgender woman like Cosette is diametrically opposed to being non-white, evil and transgender like the Thénardiers.

TRANSMASC!JAVERT, ANGEL!ENJOLRAS

As discussed in Chapter Three, Javert is consistently depicted as a brown-skinned Rromani man, while Enjolras is typically portrayed in fanworks as white or as a light-skinned person of colour. What lies underneath the following gendered portrayals is a commonly headcanoned racial identity that remains vague, othered and under researched within fandom. There are currently 80 works that depict Javert as a transgender man on AO3 (just over 2% of a total 3,412 that include him as a character).[76] One tumblr-based artist (partially anonymised as @JT here)[77] frequently draws Javert as a trans man: in one image, he is shaving his iconic mutton chops topless, sporting chest-scars and a hairy chest (2018c), in another, he wears a t-shirt that reads "Trans is beautiful", in another, a chest binder to

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[76] The tag system on AO3 is, while extensive and well-used, determined by user input. These fics may be tagged as 'FTM Javert', 'ftm!javert', 'Transvert', 'transgender character', 'trans man character', 'Javert is trans' or many similar iterations (including misspellings) which, though aggregated by volunteer tag wranglers to redirect to the same place, means there is no way to give a concrete number.

[77] I opt to partially anonymise the user here, though provide a clickthrough to their work in the bibliography. This ensures their username is not associated with the body of this work, but that their artwork is attributed fairly as recommended by Dym and Fiesler.

flatten his chest (2018a). In one comic he sits at a stall that reads "Free Psychiatric Help &

Projection", smiling and wearing a transgender flag badge (2018b). Below these works of

art, the artist confidently proclaims that they project onto Javert, stating that the art is self-

indulgent and brings them comfort. What is notable about these portrayals is that this

Javert is a very close rendition of how Javert is described by Hugo in the novel: a pug nose,

two enormous sideburns that grow like forests, a terrible, gummy grin, hair that falls into his

eyes, a permanent frown line and huge, hairy hands (I,5,v,144). Hugo's description is not a

positive one (Beaghton argues that Hugo 'emphasizes Javert's unattractive and […] bestial

physiognomy' (154)), and yet this description is one that is taken and projected upon,

romanticised as being something that can cause *euphoria*. Grossman for example sees

Javert as being 'stiff, straight, rectilinear— that is, "masculine"', (1991, 99), the male that

sits opposite the 'twisting, tortuous space of lawlessness' embodied by Monsieur

Thénardier's 'monstrous appetite' and 'femininity' (1991, 98; 102). As Vena states:

> trans men must learn to navigate masculinity in ways both akin to and different from
>
> their cisgender counterparts. These navigations may lead to wholeheartedly
>
> different expressions of masculinity, or they may conform to more mainstream or
>
> traditional notions of what is appropriately masculine. It is thus not uncommon for
>
> trans men to adopt or reproduce normative social scripts as a means of legitimizing
>
> our male gender identity because abiding by dominant cultural values—problematic
>
> as this may be—helps validate us as suitably male (Vena #1.2).

Thus, for this transmasculine artist, to be a bestial,[78] hairy *man* is a goal that they aspire

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[78] Javert is commonly associated with dogs and wolves (I,5,v,143; II,5,x,390; III,8,xxi,669; V,4,i,1080)

towards, and so these traditionally 'unattractive', hyper-masculine features are portrayed

lovingly. These portrayals of Javert might be a rejection of the traditional beauty standards

placed on women, where the transmasculine artist achieves freedom from the

categorisation of 'woman' only when they are read as the opposite to the *ideal*: Javert is not

white, effeminate, thin nor beautiful. Similar to the above discussion of how white

transmasculine people find euphoria in claiming dirt and animality as part of their gender

expression, the Javert of fandom is a product of the constraints of white supremacy, which

categorises 'real' (white) women as biologically and ideologically distinct from the

monstrous non-white, non-female body. As with all forms of racial stereotype, these tools

have their intended effect on both the 'other' and on those who *should* aspire to be the

'ideal': they warn those who do not follow the societal rules of white womanhood that they

will be outcast for their subsequent monstrosity while they 'applaud the "correct"

behaviors' of white women (Strings 211). Because the 'image of fat black women as

"savage" and "barbarous" in art, philosophy, and science, and as "diseased" in medicine has

been used to both degrade black women and discipline white women' since the nineteenth

century (*Ibid.*), we find in this art the white desire to defy gendered expectations of white

'women' and to attain a barbarous status.

This is not to say that Javert is the most prolific transmasculine goal within the

fandom: there are approximately 550 fanfictions with the tag 'trans Enjolras' on AO3 and as

such he is far more commonly imprinted on as a vessel for transgender characters within

the novel than Javert is.[79] This is perhaps because his masculinity better represents younger

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[79] For comparison, in Rose's analysis of trans fanfiction of the BBC's *Sherlock*, he states that only 200/13,000 hosted on the site are of *Sherlock* characters, despite its dominant position in online fandom that shared the

white fans' experiences in the early years of non-binary and transmasculine transition:

> [Enjolras] had an excessively youthful look, as fresh as a young girl's, […] Already a
> man, he seemed still to be a child […] that college-escapee face, that page-boy neck,
> those long blond eyelashes, those blue eyes, that wild hair flying in the wind, those
> rosy cheeks, those fresh young lips (III,4,i,536).

As Nordmarken recalls of how people perceive him, his 'age is queer' and is 'young-looking' due to his transness, his medical transition giving his thirty-year-old body the look of a pubescent man (Nordmarken 38; 37). For white readers pre- or not desiring a medical transition, the androgynous, excessive youthful Enjolras who is canonically the resplendent *male* leader of the barricades is a racial-gender fit. His youthful white androgyny is not that of the despised Other but an angelic, God-like one, reminiscent of the Classical Greek marble statue (III,4,i,536; IV,12,viii,915; V,1,viii,985) depicting the pubescent male than a 'terrible' beast. Javert has one moment of femininity in the novel: when attacking Madame Thénardier he says: 'You may have a beard like a man but I've got claws like a woman' (III,8,xxi,669), aligning this one aspect of the female form with the 'wild instincts of a female beast' (Grossman 1994, 85). In picking Javert with his thick, unmanicured eyebrows and chubby body as the transgender vessel, artists like @JT do not simply find euphoria in masculinity, but specifically in a *monstrous* trans-masculinity that associates itself with depictions of the *non-female, non-white* creature.

As noted above with Éponine, different transgender people desire representations of

the self in diverse ways, and no two transgender people will find align their gender and race the same way when doing a reading. I do think it important, however, to note when the blond, blue eyed man is cast within the realm of the Godly and the angelic in his transmasculinity and when the pug-nosed huge and hairy man remains monstrous so that we do not continue to allow easy associations with racialised gender to persist. Though done unintentionally, these determinations 'act to perpetuate Western notions of beauty, imperialist values, and the idea that African bodies are monstrosities' (Batelaan and Abdel-Shehid 147). There should be no reason why a fat, dark-skinned, hairy transmasculine Enjolras cannot be the androgynous 'angel' of fanart, just as there should be no reason Javert's masculinity cannot be 'rosy-cheeked' with 'fresh young lips'. Yet even within the confines of euphoric, twenty-first century transgender fanart, gender and race seem to be taken to be as biologically, racially codified as Hugo's nineteenth-century use of racist pseudosciences like physiognomy and phrenology were.

QUEER HEALING, QUEER LOVE

While we remain aware of the racialisation at play, as discussed above, the popularity of these fanworks gives us the language we need to argue that interpretations that are not limited to white, cis heterosexuality can be seen as desirable readings of the text. We can also see that fans can and are slowly beginning to decolonise the commonly-held tools of white supremacy that only allow self-hating, unloved men to be racialised as non-white, creating worlds where a transgender Javert-of-colour can find love in healing, non-violent spaces unlike those found in adaptations like Shilton's *Barricades* or Davies' *BBCMis*. Furneaux calls these nursing narratives 'curative' because they undermine the 'critical bias towards moments of violence in queer readings' (Furneaux 207), where there

has been a long-held belief that queerness must relate to brutality, violence and masculine aggression.

The Javert of these illustrations is unquestioningly and unapologetically transgender, his body celebrated for both the features we might traditionally understand as 'manly' (a flat, hairy chest, a broad jaw and thick hands,) as well as those that are not exclusive to but certainly iconic of trans masculinity. The crescent-moon scars of fanart are recognisable features within trans communities as being those of a double mastectomy, a surgery undertaken by some people assigned female at birth to remove their breast tissue, and which Stryker claims for the *Frankenstein's* monster of transness (Stryker 238). In one tag the author says: "the thought that my trans javert [sic] doodles may make at least one person smile or feel a little bit better truly means the world to me" (@JT, 2018b). In none of these images do we read shame or self-hatred, because these artists read Javert from a euphoric perspective, where what a white male author has described as thick hair, a wide nose, and a formidable mouth are reframed as attractive and desirable traits. As Page argues, 'fan fiction offers the possibility for gay characters to be desirable and open in their romantic and sexual expression. Trans characters, too, have the potential to express their affection and identity in ways considered too taboo for traditional media', especially as something that is not a 'cause for tension or anxiety' (Page #3.4).

Beaghton argues that a large part of the appeal of Javert comes from a fan's association with the 'good-looking and charismatic perform […] with a beautiful voice' who plays him, and that it is 'inevitable' that he therefore attracts 'idolizing fan attention' (154), pointing to 'dedicated fan sites' like fanfiction.net and Geocities. While this is not entirely false, I believe it mischaracterises and flattens a portion of the fandom that does not simply *idolise* the character and his actor as purely attractive, objectifiable bodies but 'want more

difficult problems to work through' (Jenkins xxv) and thus find the complexity of Javert's

mental state a fertile playground for creative work. Thompson argues that the 'gradual

revelation of a central taboo can act as a commentary on both the reader's relationship with

the text and the writer's negotiation of external and internal mechanisms of censorship'

(Thompson 141), and similarly Coppa argues that fans are often interested in

'transformations of social identity', where the question "What If?" is 'intended to unearth

[…] relationships, events, and experiences that affect our understanding of who a character

is' (13). Beaghton herself later grants that Javert has the potential to 'spark the deeper

reflection and independent thinking Hugo wanted to provoke in his *lecteur pensif*, or

"thoughtful reader"' (157), and it is to this fan capacity for reflection that we see in the

queer power of healing as displayed in the romantic fanfictions of Valjean/Javert.

Roche notes that Javert's familial disconnection and virginity is paralleled with that

of Valjean's, and that their 'antithetical relationship' is 'prescribed by the romance model'

(Roche 2007, 153). As parallels, their unification as a romantic and/or sexual partnership is

the opportunity to explore what healing and restorative powers access to queer love might

grant them. As such these fans purposefully twist Hugo's Javert by imagining a life after the

novel, in which he is taken from Hugo's white grasp and given time and space to think

critically about himself (@oldbooksandnewmusic; @secretmellowblog) and his actions in

the loving embrace of a queer relationship (@jadenvargen, 2022b). Grossman makes

reference to the garden and to nature as 'erotic love', especially in relation to Cosette and

Marius, and also parallels the relationship of Valjean with Javert, where their 'battle of

gazes' is a 'universal love duet' (Grossman 1994 305). While Grossman points to how

Valjean is 'closely identified with gardens' as a pruner and a cultivator (1994, 304), she

misses that Javert has a heart of wood (not of stone), furthering the bond that ties the two

men. Hugo writes: 'Fantine would have caused a heart of stone to melt with her pleas, but there is no melting a heart of wood' (I,5,xvii,162). Many fans use this imagery in their artwork to depict Javert in an imagined post-novel scenario where there is a theme of growth, towards self-love. In several works 'his unexpected transformation into a romantically appealing figure' (Beaghton 144) is signified by the iconography of this wooden heart: Valjean extends a hand over Javert's heart and glowing green shoots extend as if growing from Javert's chest (@breastofbronze; @genderfeel), and Valjean and Javert kiss in clothing heavily embroidered with plant imagery with the caption "love you grow into" (@jadenvargen, 2022a). Roche makes similar links between the nurture of the garden and the 'access to the nourishment and solace it provides—in the form of direct spiritual affirmation or emotional or intellectual fulfillment' (Roche 2016, 26), and it is to this affirmation and fulfilment of the nature/cultivator relationship that fans of the Javert/Valjean pairing are often drawn to. Within *LM*, as characters like Marius, Cosette, Éponine, Mabeuf and Bishop Myriel fuse with nature, 'their moral rehabilitation or blossoming' corresponds with a 'return or highlighting of physical beauty' because 'the relay of the soul is unambiguous' (Roche 2016, 32). Javert, who dies by suicide almost immediately as his soul begins its journey to rehabilitation, is not granted the time within the novel to blossom and thus his wooden heart remains with its connotations of dead wood: old, brittle, without life. The pairing of Valjean the cultivator with a Javert-who-lives ensures that the wooden heart is given the chance to be perceived within the language of beauty. In this new space, Javert's severed, wooden heart is allowed proximity to cultivation: Valjean having had a past as a tree-pruner (I,2,vii,80) and with his oft-quoted speech about weeds (I,5,iii,139; @nollimet; @fluentisonus), becomes a guide as well as a romantic partner. Javert throws aside his connection with the police, the embodiment of

institutional white superiority that severed his heart within these works, and only once he begins to take pride in his gender identity and queer sexuality, so Javert's wooden heart regains its life.

FATHER/MOTHER/PARENT JEAN VALEAN

The roles undertaken in the community unit that successfully raise the next generation are fundamentally broken in the world of *LM*, where fathers abandon their children, mothers are unable to nurture their young, children are killed before adulthood (Roche 2007, 155; 76) and families 'dematerialize and leave behind waste' (Moisan 89). Welcomed into these situations is the interference of the childless protagonist, Jean Valjean, whose freedom to navigate the world comes, in part, from his lack of a personal entanglement with cisheteronormativity via his disinterest in romantic or sexual relationships and binary gender roles. As Grossman argues, Valjean 'incorporates both anarchy and regularity into a more complex, hybrid order that corresponds to his multiple gender roles in the novel. Thus, as a parent figure, he embraces motherhood and fatherhood alike' (Grossman 1991, 101; Roche 2007, 138-9).[80] Instead of the '*either/or*' of conventional male/father, female/mother, good/citizen, bad/criminal construction, Valjean is the '*both/and*' of the parent/citizen/criminal (Grossman 1994, 111). To create the *either/or*, Grossman references Jean Maurel's 1974 article *Victor-Marie, femme à barbe*, who states that Hugo's vocation was to fulfil the 'prophecy of a hermaphroditic first name, Victor-Marie [...] to recover his femininity', as well as Michael Cooke's 1979 *Acts of Inclusion*, which reconsidered a male

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[80] In 1849, Hugo was visited by a person calling themself "the Mapah", a 'syncretic Mother-Father figure', who notified Hugo that there was a vacancy for "Holy Spirit of the Christ People" (France) (Robb 1998, 287). Though I continue to use 'parent' here, Hugo had at least one reference point for a Mother-Father.

versus female 'prejudice and cliché' to institute a 'male-and-female principle' (qtd. in Grossman 1994 172).[81] Valjean's availability to engage with problems other members of society have been made financially or emotionally incapable of dealing with thus earns him the status of a guardian: a novel-wide parental figure who, because of his lack of family, is able to adopt other people's burdens when needed, becoming the both-but-neither mother and father, a genderless parent who 'occupies in turn virtually every position' (Guy Rosa qtd. in Grossman 1994, 141).

As a twenty-four year-old, Valjean takes the place of his sister's deceased husband as his nieces and nephews' father, becoming a brother-uncle-father (I,2,vi,71). Ultimately he fails to provide for his family in this role: in resorting to theft he is imprisoned and never sees them again (74). As Moisan notes: 'All of the sketched-out potential of [Valjean's] sister and her children is erased by Valjean's robbery. Valjean's impulsive act starts a process of degeneration for the family' (Moisan 89). As Father-then-Mayor Madeleine to the town of Montreuil-sur-Mer (I,5,ii,136), he is able to provide financial and moral security to the townspeople as well as practical tips to protect crops from pests, field tools from rust, supplement animal food and advises how to create toys from coconut and straw using his knowledge from youth (I,5,iii,138-9), but the town falls to ruin when he is once again imprisoned (II,2,i,303). Valjean is not just a father but 'a father in whom there was even a mother' (IV,15,i,948). His third attempt as a guardian is his only intentional one, taking up the mantle as first Fantine and then Cosette's mother (Grossman and Stephens 2017, 391).

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[81] In doing so, Grossman points to how Valjean embodies the amphibious outskirts of Paris. This use of amphibious has been used as queer slang in French since at least the eighteenth century, including in the Marquis de Sade's 1795 *La philosophie dans le boudoir*, in which Madame de Saint-Ange states that 'je suis un animal amphibie, j'aime tout, je m'amuse de tout, je veux réunir tous les genres' [*'I am an amphibious animal, I like everything, I have fun with everything, I want to bring together all genders'*], or: is bisexual (de Sade 3).

As a mother Valjean tucks the recently-deceased Fantine into bed 'the way a mother would do for her child' (I,8,iv,246), he feels the 'pangs of a mother' as he first takes care of Cosette, (II,4,iii,363), and thus Cosette considers Valjean as being part of the 'whole host of mothers' she had grown up with (IV,3,iv,730), believing that her mother's soul had passed into Valjean, saying to herself that "He could well be my mother" (IV,3,iv,732). Grossman argues that Valjean's carrying Marius through the sewers before delivering to safety is akin to childbirth, thus 'Hugo's virile hero possesses a woman's creative power' (1991, 102), and Brombert observes that Valjean becomes Cosette's father nine months after Fantine's death (103). In a reference to the conception of Christ, Gerstman argues that Valjean becomes a 'cooperator with God', not explicitly naming Valjean as Mary but assumedly taking that human, birthing role in his relationship with God (375). As Cosette's father, Valjean takes up the mantle of a traditional protective figure against 'that ne'er-do-well of romance [who comes to] make eyes at girls who have by their side their father who loves them' (IV,15,i,949).

Stryker argues that 'having a gender is the tribal tattoo that makes one's personhood cognizable' (Stryker 250). Stryker came to terms with this concept when she noticed that the first concept attributed to her lover's child at birth was its being gendered by its biological father. She argues that the child becomes part of the family when it is given attachments to a gendered, genital-assigned role at birth. Similarly, in Nordmarken's autoethnographic recalling of his medical transition, he says:

> I am becoming at once more legible as human, more invisible as monstrous, and yet I am becoming even more monstrous than before. How bizarre. How absurd. Though, it is true. My monstrosity is becoming more visible in the parts of my body that are

hidden from view, and less visible in the more exposed parts (Nordmarken 43).

The absurdity lies in the 'technical construction' of a trans body (Stryker 238) becoming one that reads as more human to society than the queer, ill-fitting one given at birth. Nordmarken states that his first experience of bearing the weight of expectations as an (apparently) 'White, able-bodied, cisgendered, straight, male youth' is from a middle-aged white woman who approaches him, 'greeting me, inviting me, including me' (Nordmarken 43-4). He is inducted into the human society by the weight of their expectations on him. Valjean is similar:

> It was noted that what seemed to bring him around [to accepting the position of Mayor] more than anything else was the almost cranky taunt of an old woman of the people who called out to him from her front doorstep with some verve: "A good mayor is a useful thing. A person doesn't shirk the good they can do, do they?" (I,5,ii,138)

The original French : « *Un bon maire, c'est utile. Est-ce qu'on recule devant du bien qu'on peut faire ?* » (LM 165) could also be translated as 'A good Mayor, that's useful. Do we shy away from the good that we can do?', which reduces the sense of humanity translator Julie Rose attaches with having the woman call Valjean a 'person', but we can see in it the sentiment that as with Nordmarken, Valjean is given the role of a *nice young man*, and is expected to play the role in order to access a safe life in this woman's society.

Valjean is not however *fully* integrated into either a male/father- or female/mother role. In his attempts as a father, his fathering qualities are praised in his ability to provide economic means and his bettering of society via his wards' education, but he fails when the family unit becomes unstable due to his incarceration and when he cannot pass on a

reputable name as an inheritance. As a mother, when he considers how Cosette is growing

up to be a beautiful young woman and contemplates losing her, Hugo notes that this 'was

the difference between his tenderness and the tenderness of a mother. What he watched in

anguish a mother would have watched with joy' (IV,3,v,735). This I argue is because of

Hugo's awareness of the failures of the binary gendered, generational society as built and

harnessed in this society. As Brombert argues, the 'cancellation of the father-presence

symbolically reflects a political desire to erase the entire 1789-1815 period as a criminal and

irrelevant interlude' (102), thus creating a gap where only the non-male non-father parent

must intervene to nurture the abandoned child. Yee furthers this to posit that this concern

of paternal inheritance means that 'unease at the prospect of identification with earlier

generations leads to an attraction to the exotic as a means of challenging that inheritance'

(Yee 2008 105). It is thus only once Valjean purposefully strips himself from society's

understanding of his gender roles and situates himself outside of the broken structures of

cis heteronormativity that he can succeed, operating as a both-but-neither agender[82] parent

to those around him: by 'identifying with everyone, he substitutes for the many' (Grossman

1994 155). In this form he is both nurturing and protective, using his unnatural strength to

save children from burning buildings (I,5,ii,135) and barricades with the 'agility of a tiger'

carrying off its prey (V,1,xxiii,1027), as well as his gentility to nurture crops (I,5,iii,139) and

flower gardens (II,8,ix,469; IV,3,ii,725). Valjean refuses categorisation within a binary system

in which the masculine is stereotyped as hard and strong and the feminine is docile and

beautiful, existing as an agender entity that fills the 'absence of the family structure' left in

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[82] Agender: 'a person who has an internal sense of being neither male nor female nor some combination of male and female**:** of, relating to, or being a person whose gender identity is genderless or neutral' (Merriam-Webster "Agender"). Some Agender people identify as under the non-binary umbrella, while others do not identify with having *any* gender.

society that would otherwise propel more characters towards misery (Roche 2007, 155).

ASEXUAL, AROMANTIC, AGENDER

While gender and sexuality are concepts that do not equate one another, I argue that in this case, Valjean's agender identity is interlinked with his alternate family structure. Because the 'nuclear family norm is built on a heterosexual, long-term, sexually monogamous, romantic partnership' (Tessler 5), it is not enough to only be an agender parent: he must also challenge the idea of compulsory sexual and/or romantic desire as a requisite for intimate relationships. Hugo states that Valjean 'had never loved anything', and that his heart 'was virginal in so many ways' (II,4,ii, 363). He had also 'never really thought about what the beauty of a woman was' (IV,3,v,734). The closest he comes to love is his feelings for his daughter, Cosette, which Hugo clarifies are platonic despite his reverence (IV,15,i,947). Valjean's sexual identity has been a subject of fascination for many critics. Gertsman argues that Valjean's status as an adoptive/surrogate parent is a common one in Hugo's fiction, where, similar to the substitution of fathers between God and Joseph, a 'physical paternity is replaced by a divine, non-sexual siring' (Gerstman 372). Llosa sees this religious aspect as a negative: 'What disasters follow from a sin of the flesh! On the matter of sex, the morality of *Les Misérables* melds perfectly with the most intolerant and puritanical interpretation of Catholic morality' (Llosa 72). Robb argues that one reading of this break in the biological line is that it may have reflected Hugo's own anxieties about hereditary transmission of mental health conditions like schizophrenia from father to daughter, especially of concern to Hugo in this period as his daughter Adèle exhibited similar symptoms to that of Hugo's brother Eugène (1998, 399). By fathering Cosette, Valjean does not genetically transfer his defects, and thus only passes on nurtured qualities.

Grant calls Valjean's love for Cosette 'in large measure suppressed eroticism', arguing that under his 'saintly exterior, there lurks some of the Hugolian *faune*. If he can overcome his suppressed erotic love, he will indeed be worthy of salvation' (Grant 165). Brombert agrees, naming it as 'the latent incestuousness of Valjean's feelings for Cosette' (Brombert 103). Grossman contests that that Valjean's '"divine" passion—one that multiplies the angles from which to regard the other— may in effect illustrate his ability to relate empathetically to a broad spectrum of people, regardless of age, gender, or class' (Grossman 1994 141).

In the twenty-first century, we might read Valjean's lack of sexual desire within the novel as one of several options. First, this may be an involuntary celibacy[83] due to his life circumstances leaving little time nor opportunity for sexual maturity. As Hugo states: Valjean's youth was 'spent in hard and badly paid labour. He had never been known to have a "sweetheart" in the region. He had never had the time to fall in love' (I,2,vi,71). Valjean was then taken from this adolescence and placed in prison, growing into (non-sexual) maturity while in Toulon. The argument could thus be made that this incarceration prevented any (hetero)sexual education. A second interpretation may be Valjean's voluntary celibacy on account of his devotion to doing God's work to pay back the Bishop who 'bought his soul'. As Grossman argues, 'millennia of religious prescriptions [and the] enforced chastity of penned monks and the sexless marriages of nuns to a dead Christ' (Grossman 2016, 199) have coloured how we view asexuality as being a significantly religious one. Whether consciously or not, the town trusts in Valjean's celibacy because it is, in some way, an indication of his not placing any individual (including himself) above the

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[83] A term coined by Alana in 1993 as a kinder, non-judgemental term for people struggling to navigate dating that has since been bastardised by alt-right men now referring to themselves as the abbreviation 'INCEL' (Baker, *Elle*).

community. The townspeople note that nobody comes or goes to his rooms and so imagine them as an 'anchorite's cell' (I,5,iii,139), projecting religious *saintliness* onto this solitude. In Valjean these aspects are speculated on by his community, and then absorbed into their consideration of him. His disinterest in sex is deemed to be a positive, religious attribute in his community. In a third reading we might see Valjean as being aromantic and asexual, terms used to describe a lack of sexual and romantic desire, both classified as part of the LGBTQIA+ spectrum.[84] The importance of this reading would be to go against the dominant societal pre-supposition that experiencing sexual and romantic desire are 'non-contestable' facts of humanity (Flore 17), which I come back to below.

While there is some use to differentiating between these readings, in an unpublished paper, Eunjung Kim argues that:

> the attempt to differentiate asexuality from other political and cultural practices such as celibacy, as well as from biological "dysfunctions" such as impotence or the inability to experience orgasm, reduces asexuality to a single entity and simplifies sexuality, thereby reinforcing the explanatory power of medical discourse over an individual's diverse experiences (qtd. in Barounis 182).

While religious chastity, impotence and asexuality are not exact synonyms, Kim urges us to remember that for some individuals, these identities may be hard to disentangle – or indeed that doing so is unwanted. For instance, in his work on the representation of impotence in

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[84] Tessler states that we should consider asexuality and aromanticism as 'separate parallel identity' spectrums, arguing that previous studies have only studied aromanticism as a subset of asexuality, despite respondents to surveys typically separating these identities from one another (Tessler 4). In this work I consider Valjean's sexual and romantic identity together and thus do not separate the concepts, but in future research would consider each separately.

queer literature, Andrew Kaye Kauffmann urges us to consider 'all dimensions' of this 'reality', not just when impotence is portrayed as isolated taboo (2022). Valjean in a more complex reading can therefore be a person who can/does not experience sexual arousal or romantic attachment while also choosing to remain celibate as part of his religious practise.

Saying this, doing a specifically asexual reading for Valjean is also important because of the common 'discourses that make asexuality more or less implausible and uninhabitable for men' (Przybylo 225). In one study, asexual male participants told Przybylo that '"being a man," "being sexual," and "being straight" are […] closely allied and aligned with each other' (235). Another stated that:

> To "be a real man" […] means having to play along with the (hetero)sexualized performance of masculinity, to become a "horn dog," to devour with one's gaze. [...] Manliness is thus intimately bound up with not only having sex but also with ostentatiously performing an interest in sex when among other men (236)

In similar interviews with aromantic people (especially those outside of gender binaries), Tessler states that there was a desire for a change in the idea of a heteronormative family where relationships 'do not have to be romantic in order to be significant' (Tessler 16). To name a character with a canonical lack of sexual desire 'asexual aromantic' is to go some way towards establishing these identities as having precedence, lending the weight of the canonical Classical text to identities still believed to be 'disordered and pathological' and as individuals who are 'absent and lacking' of a fundamental 'requirement' of life (Flore 17; 27).

Julyan Oldham states that 'classic' ways to read asexuality in literature are grounded in concepts of female 'frigidity' or 'virginity', and I would argue that Valjean's asexuality has

yet to be considered despite this same language used to describe him because these terms are historically deemed to be female qualities. While there is a gendered stigma on single women for 'not sufficiently prioritizing finding a romantic partner' (Tessler 5) that single men like Valjean are not as beholden to, there has perhaps been an attempt to minimise Valjean's relationship status both in adaptation and in critical scholarship.

The Valjean of *BBCMis* is, for example, both sexualised and masculinized by Davies and Shankland. When Cosette reaches maturity and desires a new wardrobe, Valjean joins her to get outfitted. As we experience a montage in which the joyful girl Cosette is made into a woman with increasingly more revealing outfits, we see shot-reverse shots of Valjean slumped in his seat from our perspective on Cosette's side behind the curtain, and then Valjean's perspective of the dressmaker looking through this gap, keeping an eye on Valjean. The dressmaker catches Valjean when he looks up, purposefully intending on sneaking a peek through the curtain at Cosette, mid-undress. Caught, the script tells us that 'he looks away hastily. [Valjean]'s face. He's got problems' (Davies "Episode Four" 23). Davies implies here that Valjean feels sexual desire towards his underage daughter. In doing so, Davies argues that incestual[85] and paedophilic[86] desire are sexualities that are worth giving space to be explored by his protagonist, because they are still hetero and *sexual*. It can be assumed that should Cosette have been male, Davies would not have given any thought to including a similar delightful undressing montage in which Valjean would sneak a

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[85] Though not blood relations, Valjean and Cosette's relationship is that of father and daughter. Sexual relations between an adoptive parent and child are illegal in the United Kingdom under the Sexual Offences Act 2003.
[86] While actress Ellie Bamber was 21 at the age of filming and the character is not given an age on screen, Cosette is between 14 and 15 in this scene in the novel.

peek at his underage son, whether Valjean has 'got problems' or not.[87] Brombert links what

he calls 'the latent incestuousness of Valjean's feelings for Cosette' with the 'incest motif'

that 'subtly reappears in Gillenormand's relation to his grandson' (Brombert 103; 104),

quoting the novel where Hugo states that Gillenormand had 'never loved any mistress the

way he loved Marius' (IV,8,vii,845). While Davies explores Valjean's feelings for Cosette, he

does not romanticise or fetishize the latter. Though it is fair to argue that Valjean's troubled

relationship with Cosette is more central to the dramatic movement of the narrative than

Marius/Gillenormand, by giving Valjean sexual urges he struggles against, Davies

purposefully re-affirms white, allosexual masculinity rather than depict the character as

being asexual/aromantic. As Richard Dyer writes, 'white men were expected to "struggle

against" sexual desire as a show of their strength and capacity for self-sacrifice' (qtd. in

Owen 123), and Owen furthers this to argue that society perceives asexual (white) men as

'failing to live up to the ideal of civilized restraint because they lack the sex drive that

whiteness aspires to restrain' (127). Restraint and self-sacrifice are *civilised* and specifically

white because non-white sexual men are codified as being animalistic, unrestrained

barbarians, and non-white women are bodies to be colonised (Goddard 5). "Civilization"

then took 'normative heterosexuality as the emblem of order, nature, and universality,

making that which deviated from heteropatriarchal ideals the sign of disorder' (Ferguson 6).

To be an asexual white man is to disprove this regulated, taxonomic divide. Davies did not

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[87] Robb notes that there has been moralistic outcry over Hugo's works and their apparent incestuous nature since his very first critics, though argues that these are 'no more shocking in *Les Contemplations* than […] in some mythologies' (Robb 1998, 356). Lewis states that biographers 'indicate no reason to suspect incestuous feelings or actions between Hugo and his daughter Léopoldine, but the father's intense resistance to seeing his daughter married, and therefore implicitly sexualized, is well documented' (Lewis 2015, 13). Davies also mentions in an interview that he enjoyed writing the Valjean-Cosette relationship because it mirrored his relationship to his daughter.

see Valjean's asexuality as being a positive trait but as *disordered*, and so emphasised instead a perverse sexuality by implying that Valjean's thoughts towards both the underage Cosette and to his employee Fantine were sexual ones rather than parental ones.

When textual acceptance of asexuality and non-binary identity is adapted into enforced heterosexuality, this is an anti-canonical attempt to appropriate a protagonist for the heteronormative cause (Robb 2005, 215). As Stephens argues,

> the scope of Hugo studies in emphasizing Hugo's complexities could be reiterated and indeed broadened by probing the overt masculine sexuality that his extraordinary egotism and *galanterie* are seen to represent (2009, 74).

By doing a purposefully asexual, aromantic reading we can challenge the concept of 'compulsory sexuality, the idea that everyone desires sex' (Tessler 3) in our readings. When Llosa, for example, considers Hugo's sexuality to contrast against Hugo's 'vindication of asexuality' *LM* (75), Llosa says that Hugo's sex life was 'so intense and varied that it gives cause for astonishment (and, of course, a certain envy)' (3). The assumption that Hugo's voracious lust for younger women would be an enviable situation perhaps says more about the author than it does about the universality of the sentiment. Yet should an adaptation make Valjean vindicated in his asexual/aromantic identity, it is not hard to imagine outcry about making him 'woke' or forcing the modern onto the past. These real and hypothetical cognitive biases go some way to display how what we might consider *normal* for a nineteenth-century white 'male' character are very often legacies of white, heteronormative adaptation and not canonical truths.

What this reading of Valjean as asexual, aromantic and agender can thus bring us is an awareness that his nonconformity is believed so threatening it must be silenced in

adaptation, as if to reveal his potential for transness is to dislodge the novel from its

Classical status. The novel's Valjean is made into a monster by his adaptor and must be

cleaned of his apparent imperfections before he can be considered 'male' on screen:

wearing 'magic pants' that make him heterosexual, violent, rude, and swaggering (Kemp

38). Unlike the Thénardier family, Valjean is not subject to traditional sources of gender

play: he does not cross-dress or otherwise disguise his gender in order to deceive, nor is his

masculinity questioned through consistant racialisation. His relationship to non-conforming

gender thus becomes minimised in adaptation and in fan concepts of the character, despite

his novel-form performing gender in ways that sit outside of the quintessentially cisgender

'masculinity' he is often assigned.[88] While Valjean looks like an everyman, he acts like an

'other': he is not heterosexual, he is not an archetypical and distant father, he is not the

emotionally repressed, biologically assigned and societally formed 'man' of the U.S.

Department of Labor's 1965 Moynihan report, where white, middle-class patriarchy is a

required structure for social normality, in which 'the adult married man, as father [rules]

over the women, children, and other family members [tying] masculinity to reproductive

heterosexuality and patricentered decent and sociality' (Chen 10). What causes fear for the

straight, white, cisgender male adaptor is that the novel's Valjean looks like a cis-

heterosexual man and not a degenerate, cross-dressing, effeminate, society-destroying

transgender person of colour with a 'deviant' queer family (Chen 11) like the criminals that

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[88] In the English-speaking world, Valjean has been portrayed most recently on screen by action starts Dominic West (2019 BBC series), Hugh Jackman (2012 Hollywood film), and Liam Neeson (1998 film), and on stage by Jon Robyns (2019-23 West End), Dean Chisnall (2019-23 UK and Ireland Tour) and Nick Cartell (2017-23 US Tour). Outside of global majority performers taking the role in their own country/tour region, Ramin Karimloo is the only man of colour to have been a principle Valjean. No openly transgender person has played the role. There is little body diversity between these actors, who embody Valjean as a well-built, broad-shouldered, able-bodied man. Gleizes argues that Valjeans in 'American cinema are, on the whole, characterized by an undeniable glamour in opposition to the more rugged portrayals in French cinema' (132).

inhabit *La Chaumière*, the oriental-influenced club of *BBCMis* (Davies "Episode Four" 31). This seeming inconsistency between 'otherness' and 'passing' raises fearful questions: who else might be a monster in disguise?

CONCLUSION

To read Valjean as asexual, aromantic and agender is to see his successes as linked with his queer gender, sexuality and romantic orientation. This is especially important in a character who is not traditionally seen as queer, and whose 'transgender identity' is not his 'defining characteristic' as, as Kemp argues, we begin to consider transness in a way that 'validates' trans peoples' experiences instead of their being 'fetishized by a remote literary discourse' (Kemp 49). It also re-conceptualises sex as default, seeing *LM* not as a novel that 'outlaws and demonizes sex' (Llosa 74) but one that sees sex as a non-mandatory factor of familial participation. Equally, to strip Valjean of his status as a cisgender man simply because he does not align with stereotypes of masculinity can also be considered problematic. It enshrines qualities assigned to 'men' as being fact and exiles him from 'male' status for not conforming with societal expectations. When Hugo was a child during a perilous mountain journey to join his military father, his mother 'ordered her boys to stay in the coach and not to behave like silly girls. [...] Once, when he was five or six years old, Victor had been found crying and, as a corrective, was taken out for a walk dressed as a girl' (Robb 1998, 34). Here, a young boy is punished for his non-conformity, and is punished with a further segregation of gender roles. To read Valjean as a cisgender man is to challenge what cis gender looks like in a Classical novel. How would our understanding of the Hugolian 'man' change should we see in Valjean a man who has, throughout his life, been rewarded (not punished) for not

conforming to cisheteronormative quantifications of gender? For Hugo, society has advanced when a man who cries when he is sad and scared continues to be allowed his 'male' identifier. Both readings can sit in parallel, but our consideration of a cisgender Valjean becomes stronger when we consider his status as trans, rather than because it is the 'default'.

In understanding how concepts of gender and race are entrenched in our language, we can continue to unpick how these same concepts affect our language use when discussing Classic, canonical literature written by white, cisgender male authors. Saintly, non-binary Jean Valjean and self-loving trans man Javert sit within different concepts of gender to the non-human, non-binary Éponine and the Thénardiers because of how they are racialised and gendered in Hugo's text, but in keeping aware of how to avoid the perpetuation of gendered concepts of race, I believe that there are bountiful readings to be made across nineteenth-century literature that use concepts of gender *euphoria* as a process of decolonising our language of desire, beauty and humanity.

CONCLUSION

LOVELY LOCKS

The stage musical has not been a focus of this thesis, despite its position as one of the most recognisable adaptations of *LM*. It thus serves as a useful case study in concluding how race and gender are inextricably linked in cultural imaginations of *Les Misérables*. As we have seen throughout, *LM* in all incarnations prioritizes white womanhood, which is once again repeated through the consistent casting of Cosette as non-Black against a Black Éponine. Éponine, consistently cast as a Black woman, becomes a stand in for the idea that poor, Black women *must* die to urge white men (Hugo/Marius) into action, using this impetus to prevent what has happened historically to Black people (Éponine) from happening to white women (Cosette).

Figure 48 A comparison of pictures of Amara Okereke as Cosette. In the photo on the left, she wears a brown wig with loose, straight hair. In the photo on the right she wears her natural hair which is black with tight ringlets, a mix of Type 3 and 4 hair.

In 2018, Amara Okereke was the first Black principal actress to play Cosette in an

English language production.[89] This was the first time that a Black woman's joy and safety was presented as being of paramount importance to the story. From the production stills in Broadway World (Figure 48), it appears that Okereke wore a light brown, straight wig in standard productions (@lesmizofficial "Please join us") but wore her natural hair, which is black with tight ringlets in the Staged Concert performances (Wild; Broadway World). As mentioned previously, hair is a 'central symbol' to Black beauty and empowerment because 'black people's natural, kinky hair has historically been vilified as ugly' (Goddard 2007, 162). Subira Das argues that hair type and eye colour only 'matter' now because 'they have political meaning attached to them' (qtd. In Saini 75). They, unlike other bodily variables like height and weight, ascribe certain racial categories that were useful for Nazi scientists to assign 'rationality' and 'objectivity' to human difference. To have Cosette, Hugo's pinnacle of beauty, wear natural hair on stage begins to change how audiences understand 'beauty', all the more powerful considering how we unpicked Hugo's language of Blackness (connoting the inhuman, the monstrous and the Evil) in Chapter One. However, for this hair to only be on display in the lower-budget, non-standard concert production not in the main production informs us how we as an audience are supposed to receive Cosette and other 'beautiful' women like Fantine: they are, as Hugo argues, their most beautiful when aligned to whiteness.

Similar to the colourism of the casting of the Thénardier children as discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis, we can look at a particularly bleak and painfully obvious trend in that all actors playing Fantine on stage, including Black and British East and Southeast Asian (ESEA) women, have historically been made to wear blonde or light brown wigs, no matter

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[89] Amanda K'Odingo was the first Black alternate actress in the Norwegian production in 2018.

their natural hair colour or type. Rankine recalls an evening where she and other academics of colour consider Black students who dye their hair blonde in a series of questions and statements: 'Blonde hair need not mean human, it need not mean feminine, it need not mean Anglo or angel' (308). 'Does dyeing hair blond mean one is reaching for something, someone, some other body in a fantasy of white-pleasing pleasantness?' (316). 'I suppose if all I had to do was bleach my hair blond to stop white supremacists from wanting to burn crosses in my yard, I might consider blondness myself' (322). A white cashier says men treat her better with dyed blonde hair: 'Is civility what's being chased, the civility that is owed to white purity?' (326). 'I try to think of a single other signifier of whiteness that free-floats like blond hair. Nothing comes to mind' (330). 'Are white supremacist ideals ordinary aspirations?' (330). In the 1960s, bell hooks relates, 'young black folks found just how much political value was placed on straightened hair as a sign of respectability and conformity to societal expectations when they ceased to straighten their hair' (1988). Black women are also often taught that their hair is not 'sensual or beautiful in an unprocessed state' but 'ugly' and 'frightening' (*ibid*). 'The reality is: straightened hair is linked historically and currently to a system of racial domination that impresses upon black people, and especially black women, that we are not acceptable as we are, that we are not beautiful' (*ibid*). As can be seen in an Instagram post comparing Fantines across the West End stage (Figure 49; @lesmizofficial "'I dreamed a dream in time gone by…'"), white actresses like Celinde Shoenmaker and Carrie Hope Fletcher sport styled wigs that fit modern ideas of beauty (straight or loosely coiled blonde hair). Rachelle Ann Go, a Filipino actress wears a fluffy, light brown wig with blonde highlights, which does not match her thicker, natural straight, black hair (@gorachelleann "It's been 3 months"). Chanice Alexander-Burnett's wig, with loose brown curls, does not match her natural textured hair (@chaniceab "Hey

Dahlinnns!!"). Though neither actresses of colour wear a blonde wig as all white Fantines do, these styles reflect white beauty standards: where light highlights and a proximity to thinner, straighter hair texture are of preference. This decision is quickly becoming an identifier of *LM*'s active decision: Shan Ako (who has previously played Éponine), in her role as Eliza (the beautiful Schuyler sister of *Hamilton*) wears her hair in tight, black ringlets (@ShanOfficially "Happy 6 Months"). And, even in a show not created specifically to cast people of colour in white roles, Emilie Kouatchou wears a more natural black wig as the first Black performer to play Christine in *Phantom of the Opera* on Broadway (@operafantomet "Emilie Kouatchou's Christine wardrobe"). The 'lovely locks' have become Fantine-exclusive, even while similar shows adapt their visual identifiers of beauty.

Figure 49 A collage of nine actresses in the role of Fantine, wearing green or light blue dresses. All wear blonde or brown wigs with a straight or loosely coiled texture.

Figure 50 Four photographs of Black women who have played Éponine. Shan Ako in photographs 1 and 4 wears her hair in twists and braids, respectively. In photo 2, Tegan Bannister has loose, wavy-curly hair. In 3, Karis Jack wears her hair in twists.

Figure 291 A comparison photos of two Southeast Asian women, Eva Noblezada playing Éponine and Rachelle Ann Go playing Fantine. Noblezada has her natural black hair loose, and her brown skin is darkened with dirt. Go wears a blonde-brown wig that is loosely wavy and thick.

This choice is only heightened by the fact that the Black and ESEA actresses who play

Éponine do so with their natural hair colour and texture (Figure 50).[90] Eva Noblezada wore

her natural black hair as Éponine even as fellow Filipino cast member Rachelle Ann Go wore

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[90] Nathania Ong wears her thick, black hair naturally (@lesmizofficial "First two show day"), Shan Ako wore her hair in braids, a protective hairstyle for afro-textured hair (@lesmizofficial "Let the wine of friendship"), Tegan Bannister wore her natural hair (@lesmizofficial "I didn't see you there"), Karis Jack wore her hair in twists (@lesmizofficial "If he asked…").

a blonde wig as Fantine (@lesmizofficial "Last chance") (Figure 51). Éponine, who is non-human and non-binary, who must die for the white, cisgender Cosette's survival, can retain her qualities of colour, perpetuating the legacy of Hugo's racial, gendered language. The only Black female actor to wear Type 4 texture hair out of a protective hairstyle as a named character on the West End stage is Kelly Agbowu playing Madame Thénardier (Figure 52) (@lesmizofficial "Oh, hey there"). The language used to describe Madame Thénardier throughout Hugo and in adaptations returns to the idea of her failure to adhere to (white) femininity, and this failure is ultimately tracked to Blackness on stage.

Figure 302 A photograph of Kelly Agbowu dressed as Madame Thénardier in her dressing room. She is a brown-skinned Black woman with a red-tinged brown afro tied loosely behind her head.

Figure 313 A comparison of pictures of Kyle Jean-Baptiste playing Jean Valjean. In the first he wears a prison uniform and his natural hair is a short black afro and beard. In the second photo he is aged up and wears a gentleman's outfit. He wears a loosely curled grey wig, and his facial hair has been tinted grey.

Even in 2023, the *LM* production associates white ideas of beauty to its actors of colour. In giving non-white actors wigs that do not match their natural hair, the production tells us that these characters are *white,* and that we are to ignore the ethnicity of the actors playing them. Beauty standards as imposed by shows like *LM* affect the perception of all bodies on stage, not only those of colour, and this difference of beauty is physically split between characters coded as white: Fantine and Cosette, versus those who are not:

Éponine and her mother. Actors of colour are more welcome to 'look' their ethnicity when playing down-trodden characters but must perform whiteness when they are beautiful or respectable. This discrepancy is more difficult to track in male characters because of how few men of colour have played any male protagonist on the West End. Kyle Jean-Baptiste wore his hair in a short afro when he played the young, incarcerated Valjean, then wore a grey, loosely curled wig as his character aged into gentleman status (Figure 53) (@baptistekyle1 "Before and after shot"). Jordan Shaw (Figure 54) who currently plays Enjolras on the West End, wears his hair in a short, tight afro (@jordanshawuk "Hey lovely people!"), though in previous promotional images (and at the 2021 West End Live), he wore straightened, looser-textured hair that mimics European styles (@jordanshawuk "MTV cribs"; "OPENING NIGHT!"). These Black men are allowed to be 'visibly' Black, but it is notable that both characters have had their hair texture disguised, especially when Valjean moves from criminality into respectability. It is unclear when or why Shaw was able to wear his hair naturally, but the choice to initially give him a European style is in line with adaptations and fanworks of Black male characters like the BBC's Montparnasse and Javert, or fanartists' Bahorel and Bossuet.

Figure 324 A comparison of pictures of Jordan Shaw playing Enjolras. In the first photo he wears his natural, tightly coiled hair in a short afro. In the second two, he either wears a wig or relaxed hair that is loosely coiled, in a 3:7 parting.

A core issue is that the original text as created by Hugo, built on by Boublil and

Schönberg, Tom Hooper, Andrew Davies and a multitude of other cisgender white men

resists readings that are radically progressive when white supremacy is embedded within

the text. This is especially the case when race is treated as simply as the colour of a

performer's skin and whether the character's hair must become lightened and straightened

in order to be read as *beautiful* and as French. When Jordan Shaw as Enjolras sings his song

of angry men telling us that this is 'the music of the people / Who will not be slaves again!'

("One Day More"), or Kyle Jean-Baptiste as Valjean sings with his fellow prisoners that he

will 'always be a slave' ("Prologue"), are we as an audience to understand that they, like the

unnamed man in Hugo's slave gang, can 'compare chains' (IV,3,viii,747)? Or is the language,

like Hugo's, an appropriation of the language of slavery, made for a white

insurgent/incarcerated person and not fit for purpose for a Black British or

Haitian/Guyanese American actor? Can these characters of colour be cast in these roles and

simultaneously bear a non-British accent and wear costumes that (in part) represent the

heritage of a colonised people? Or are these actors of colour only tolerated when their

presence is named as a twenty-first century casting practice? Liesl Tommy is one director

who has challenged the text by making overt her references to apartheid in South Africa

(McBride 2022) but as Sarah Whitfield argues, the musical 'dematerialises the act of protest

while simultaneously celebrating it through a reliance on the imagery and structural

reproduction of white supremacist cultures' (Whitfield 2021, 2). The opening of the musical

in the Barbican in the Autumn of 1985 had an entirely white cast, staged a semi-fictional

barricade about socio-economic injustice, and yet:

The musical rehearsed through the so-called Handsworth Riots in Birmingham,

opened for previews on the night of the Brixton riots, and opened to the press on

8th October, only two nights after the notorious Broadwater Farm riots in

Tottenham, North London (Whitfield 2019, 31).

While majority-Black and South Asian people protested death and brutality at the hands of

police, white audiences mourned and applauded white revolutionaries' death in the far-off

world of nineteenth-century Paris. Grossman and Stephens argue that the musical's initial

veer towards a 'radical political tone' was 'no doubt in tune with [this] political' moment,

though co-directors Nunn and Caird stated their belief that 'a notion of God was more

important to the work's meaning' (2017, 386). Even if, however, the original musical (or

subsequent productions) had made overt links to these contemporary accounts of police

brutality, the musical (and the novel it is based on) do not currently act as sufficient vessels

for these accounts. The musical's epilogue tells us that their deserved salvation comes in

Heaven: 'They will live again in freedom / In the garden of the Lord / They will walk behind

the ploughshare / They will put away the sword'. This, Whitfield argues, presents justice as

something only accessible as a Heavenly reward, taking the 'heat' off Thatcherites in the

original audience who might worry that the musical demands them to change anything

about their own lifestyle in the present. As I finish writing this thesis on 4 October 2023, Just

Stop Oil protestors climbed the West End stage during 'One Day More', waving their orange

flag alongside the red flag of the fictionalised revolution (Figure 55). One, Hannah Taylor,

argued that the show 'can't go on' while we are in a climate emergency, stating that Rishi

Sunak's oil policies are an 'act of war on the global south and an utter betrayal of young

people […] Am I not, like Jean Valjean, justified in breaking the law to oppose this criminal

government and its murderous policies?' (*Just Stop Oil*). They were met with boos and

heckles (Hancock, *BBC News*), and commentators on Twitter did not see the irony in calling for the protestors to be imprisoned. Here, Taylor creates a living and continued bond between the wealth disparity felt by those of all races in the UK under a Tory government in 2023, the lives and livelihoods of peoples in the global south that are being destroyed by the same political actions, and Jean Valjean whose life is defined by poverty created by policy. These issues do not exist separately and are symptoms of the same forms of governance. Referring to the complex array of ideologies present at the real rebellion of 1832 that the novel is based on, Llosa notes that *LM* turns all political complexity 'into an astute abstraction': by turning groups of radically different people into a group of (mostly) bourgeois students the novel 'dissolves [...] ideological differences into a sentimental and utopian haze that is so general in its principles and its rhetoric that it represents everyone and no one, bonding them doctrinally in a lyrical intellectual fiction' (141-2). By making a similarly abstract musical adaptation, the Thatcherites in the original audience and those who would advocate in 2023 to imprison protestors for inconveniencing a show can find it easier to empathise with the performed-protestors on stage than join the fight that belongs to those who have been segregated from the show's view of social justice.

Figure 335. A photograph of a JustStopOil protestor, holding up an orange square flag with a cartoon skull on it, standing on stage grinning in the spotlight. Behind them, a barricade boy waves the red flag amidst a crowd of actors who watch the protestor. Two stage managers direct the actors off stage.

As stated in the introduction, the 'product of its time' fallacy attempts to create a linear idea of racial progress, where Hugo's nineteenth-century racist language is assumed *worse* because of our conceptions of modern progress. We cannot call Hugo's language choices within his novel a 'product of its time' because the stage musical, hailed as "Les Mis for the 21st Century" (Finkle, *HuffPost*), perpetuates Hugo's legacy while finding new and novel ways to accentuate gendered, classed, racialisation. Fantine's beauty is located in her 'pretty locks' ("Lovely Ladies"), and these locks continue to uphold Eurocentric beauty standards. This is an active decision that is being made in every casting process, in every costuming decision, in every night that the show goes on as is, which speaks to how little we have truly progressed.

NOTHING CHANGES, NOTHING EVER WILL

The fans of colour that I interviewed saw racism in the *LM* fandom as perpetual and inevitable. These fans' willingness to address concerns about racism had diminished through their sometimes decade-long witnessing of how unchanging both the fandom and adaptations have been over the years. There was a sense of begrudging defeat within those that I interviewed, echoing the musical's lyrics: 'nothing changes, nothing ever will' ("Turning"). This hopelessness has tracked into my own conceptualisations of *LM*. As mentioned in the introduction, it is with disappointment that I have had to turn from a predominant focus on *euphoria* towards the continued dissection of racism within and around this novel. This came to the fore when I presented the fandom chapter of this thesis at *Barricades* in 2022, an international *LM* AcaFan convention designed to explore *LM* in its heterocosmic entirety. The convention was run on Zoom, with pre-/post-talk discussions

taking place on discord, an instant messaging social platform. This meant that fans 'live-blogged' their reaction, including a heated debate that happened in the chat while I was presenting:

> Fan 1: i don't like the incentive where if you write a minority wrong you get jumped on, but if you don't write minorities nobody says anything

> Fan 2: is anyone in this fandom being attacked for "doing it wrong"? i haven't seen that at all […] my view, as a white person, is that it is our responsibility to do the research and do the work, even if we don't always get it perfectly. there are so untold resources for learning about people different than us. and i absolutely have taken the easy way out, personally. it's a problem. [sic][91]

In this exchange, Fan 1 reacts with defensive feelings, stating that they, as a white fan, feel attacked or 'jumped on' and so are discouraged from creating any fanwork. Fan 2 takes a proactive stance as a white ally, kindly but sternly attempting to diffuse these feelings, demonstrating to Fan 1 how they have dealt with similar feelings through self-guided research. This active allyship from a white fan was surprising, as was the support from other white fans who echoed Fan 2's stance. The convention organised a 'Fans of Colour' channel, where self-selecting participants could join a private chat designated as an affinity space. After I had presented my work, I was informed that some fans were discussing the presentation in a more disparaging manner in another *LM* community discord outside of the moderators' jurisdiction. Feeling guilty but ultimately unsurprised about this, I posted an

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[91] All fan names are anonymised. Conversations quoted happened in the #the-construction-of-race and #fans-of-colour channels of the BarricadesCon 2022 server.

apology, with a request for advice on how I might have gone about the panel in a different way. I received the following replies from the Fans of Colour chat:

> Fan 3: Uhg, white people not being able to handle their own shit is 0% your fault. [...] it is long past time for these things to come to the foreground

> Fan 4: progress can be a difficult process… I think Hugo would agree!

> Fan 5: I'm glad this fandom is having this conversation [...] It's easy to focus on the negatives, but I saw a lot of people surprised at the stark differences laid out in like the skin tone chart, and maybe I am being optimistic, but I think a sizeable amount of people will be rethinking their assumptions

I felt genuine shock to receive these messages, in which fans of colour welcomed the discourse that had been brought about, shifting the discomfort of conversations about race from *solely* our responsibility to white fans questioning their assumptions. My own perception that *nothing changes, nothing ever will* led me to assume that it would be my research on race that affected my position and comfort within this fandom: in my fear of white fragility, I had prepared myself to be exiled from the fandom. Instead, I was informed that the moderators of the convention were 'keeping an eye' on the discussions in multiple servers. I had not expected my concerns to be treated seriously, or my safety to be prioritised. Fandom is an ever-shifting being, and as mentioned previously, this work will be outdated sooner rather than later. In the last few months alone, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has begun to weave its way into conversations about the depiction of Waterloo in *LM* and the death of Elizabeth II has inspired many a guillotine-inspired artwork. There are some, like Llosa, who in 2007 saw the ideological utopianism of *LM* 'at odds with the reality

of readers today', naming how we live in an era 'in which international divisions are multiplying, in which local conflicts throw up daily enormous numbers of casualties, and in which societies in the first and third worlds are devastated by repression and terrorism, unemployment and inflation, corruption and tyranny' (113). However, while I cannot say whether the *LM* fandom has felt any influence from this project, these fans' responses show that change is feasible, tangible, and realistic to hope for. As one fan stated:

> maybe [white fans] won't read [Philippines-specific fanworks], but then somebody else will […] sometimes I run into people who send comments like "Oh, I'm reading this and I'm near [the Philippines]" and everything and it- there is some worth to it. […] there is some worth. [Kat 01:06:40]

José Esteban Muñoz writes that:

> [The] fear of both hope and utopia, as affective structures and approaches to challenges within the social, has been prone to disappointment, making this critical approach difficult. […] The eventual disappointment of hope is not a reason to forsake it as a critical thought process (Muñoz 9-10).

While it has not been possible to conclude that identity euphoria, an inherently hopeful, utopic critical approach, has been the outcome of this thesis, it is only this eye on the euphoric future that allows such critical discovery. Though disappointed here, I do not lose hope in the euphoric outlook where we need not first devote ourselves to unpicking the legacies of shame, self-hatred and dysphoria in depictions of non-white, non-cisgender people, and I hope many others continue this practise in future readings of Victor Hugo and beyond.

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