"Insurrection, Riot, and Points of Difference": The Impacts of Different Characterizations of the Rebellion in Adaptations of *Les Misérables*

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Abstract

Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* is the world's most frequently adapted novel, but remarkably few of its many adaptations successfully convey the importance of the 1832 June Rebellion. Not only is the rebellion the novel's dramatic climax, it is the culmination of its political ideals: its presence is key to understanding the plot, structure, and message of the story as a whole. When its role is minimized in adaptation to accommodate the novel's other storylines, audience members often come away with an incomplete understanding of the rebellion and the message behind it. This paper examines the different strategies used to simplify and adapt the rebellion for stage and screen, aiming to determine how the significance of the June Rebellion can be most effectively communicated to modern day audiences. In order to condense Hugo's multifaceted rebellion, adapters tend to focus on just one angle so that audiences gain a clear idea of on what terms they are meant to relate to the insurgents and their ideals. Most adaptations of *Les Misérables* justify the rebellion either through clearly communicating the historical and political context that motivated the insurgents, or through encouraging their audience to empathize with the insurgents on an individual, emotional level, while certain others fail entirely to provoke audience sympathy from either angle. The more an adaptation is able to balance both logical and emotional justifications in its depiction of the rebellion, the closer it gets to communicating Hugo's intentions to the audience and effectively transposing *Les Misérables* for the modern day viewer.

Introduction

Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* and its vast number of adaptations provide a fascinating study on the different ways in which a fictional work's meaning is received and reinterpreted

throughout its existence. Hugo's interwoven plot lines, dramatic imagery, and larger-than-life characters are incredibly well suited for adaptation.[1] It is little marvel that *Les Misérables* is, according to David Bellos, "the most frequently adapted novel of all time."[2] The novel features a large cast of compelling characters, whose lives intersect to provoke grand and tragic emotional moments, but its perhaps most enduringly relevant characteristic is the political message that these characters' lives illustrate. In *Les Misérables*, Hugo critiques a negligent social system through both his characters and his own political and historical musings — "digressions" from the linear plot which in fact compose a critical aspect of his novel's unconventional structure. However, while the stirring pathos of the novel and the glory derived from taking on such a classic work are tempting to adapters, the voice of the narrator, providing historical essays and crucial commentary on the story's events, is not so easily transposed to other mediums. Adapters frequently exclude the context provided by the narrator in order to focus on the plotlines of the book's major characters, the elements most easily adapted to fit a conventional narrative structure. In attempts to accommodate their audience and a new medium of storytelling, adapters frequently change aspects of the original, which alters the messaging that Hugo likely intended to impart. These changes, often maximizing mass appeal and cultural relevance, may shed some light on the nature of the general inclinations of the place and time in which the adaptation was made. Because of the ubiquity of *Les Misérables* in the film world and the story's political focus, it provides an ideal example for the study of how original aspects of a story can be brought out or de-emphasized in favor of different political messages.

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[1] Kathryn M. Grossman, "From Classic to Pop Icon: Popularizing Hugo," *The French Review* 74, no. 3 (February 2001): 485, https://www.jstor.org/stable/399430.
[2] David Bellos, *The Novel of the Century: The Extraordinary Adventure of Les Misérables* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017), 249.

This study aims to examine how and to what effect Hugo's original ideas have been altered or selectively included in order to display alternate viewpoints to the audience. It will look at adaptations of Hugo's *Les Misérables* as models demonstrating how the process of adaptation can, through change and reinterpretation, further advance the ideas of the source material, or dilute them in favor of appealing to a more mainstream audience. When only the characters' stories are shown, the political message, unsupported by historical context, often fades or becomes muddled. In order to simplify the story to fit a more traditional, linear progression, Jean Valjean is framed as the sole protagonist, while plotlines irrelevant to his are cut down. The stories of Les Amis de l'ABC — the student insurgents — and their deaths on the barricade suffer the most from this method of adaptation. Though only tangentially connected to Jean Valjean's narrative, the rebellion of *Les Misérables* provides a grand demonstration of the book's Romantic ideals and the culmination of its political argument: after encountering many characters beaten down by an oppressive system and struggling to do lasting good for their fellow victims, the readers are presented with a way to change the system itself.[3] Furthermore, in writing about this rebellion, Hugo himself was adapting a known story, since *Les Misérables* presents a fictionalized version of the June Rebellion. Hugo invented his own locations and characters to insert into the historical event, changing details to produce a climax that would illustrate the key principles of his novel. Now, adaptations of his work undertake the same process of reinterpretation and addition, but many end with the rebellion taking a backseat to the individual stories of Jean Valjean and Javert. The various ways in which the rebellion has been reimagined, simplified, or minimized in adaptation severely impact the message of the story as a whole and its effect on the audience. By comparing and analyzing characterization and visual

[3] Briana Lewis, episode 27, "III,4,i-iv - Landscapes and Horizons," July 10, 2018, in *The Les Misérables Reading Companion*, podcast, audio, 36:41.

cues, this project will examine how Hugo's vision has been revised for different audiences and how these aspects of the June Rebellion's portrayal affect audience perception.

Literature Review

The Adaptability of Les Misérables

In order to understand why the messages promoted in each adaptation of *Les Misérables* are so significant, one must first understand the significance of the book itself. As stated, it was incredibly influential in its own time and remains so today – this is due in part to the great confidence, talented craftsmanship, and previous fame of its author. Kathryn M. Grossman is one scholar who has published many works analyzing the cultural impact of *Les Misérables* and Victor Hugo's legacy; among these works is the article "From Classic to Pop Icon: Popularizing Hugo," which describes how Hugo has come to achieve omnipresence in today's pop culture. Grossman posits that Hugo deliberately crafted his novels with lasting cultural impact and adaptation in mind. She discusses how Hugo was also a visual artist and a playwright, and how these aspects of his creativity are evident in *Les Misérables*: the novel features vivid descriptions and dramatic scenes with great theatrical potential, which provide a tantalizing source for adapters to draw from.[4] Furthermore, Hugo himself was highly encouraging of those who would adapt his work, authorizing stage productions despite their significant changes to the original story.[5] Hugo's support for adaptation refutes the popular idea that adaptations should be judged based on fidelity to the original work, for if he encouraged change and reinterpretation, the fight to preserve his "original intentions" seems fruitless. Lastly, Grossman brings up the question of whether the commercialization and cultural accommodation of adaptation are worth expanding

[4] Grossman, "Popularizing Hugo," 486.
[5] Grossman, "Popularizing Hugo," 485.

the work's accessibility to a new audience. The process of adaptation often necessitates changing the original work to communicate with more contemporary perspectives; this can result both in a greater cross-cultural understanding of the source material and in excessive simplification of the work's more nuanced ideas. As such, when judging an adaptation, one must consider a balance between communication and preservation in order to understand the difficult task of the adapters.

David Bellos's book *The Novel of the Century: The Extraordinary Adventure of* Les Misérables provides a comprehensive overview of the context of *Les Misérables*, its author, and the process that brought it into the world. *The Novel of the Century* takes its readers through the history of *Les Misérables*, from the first hints of its characters in Hugo's scribbled ideas[6] to its publication and beyond. It interweaves this account of Hugo's authorial journey with discussions of the historical details present in the book and of the novel's significance in popular culture. Bellos's historical analysis is also extremely useful in understanding what Hugo was communicating to the audience of his time. Bellos mentions the class-related significance of fabric color in characters' clothing[7] and the symbolism of the red flag on the barricade versus Mabeuf's bloodstained coat appearing to be a black flag[8] as seemingly insignificant details that would have had weighty implications for audiences of Hugo's era. Historical details such as these, deeply symbolic but glossed over by adaptations and modern readers lacking context, demonstrate the true difficulty in conveying the ideas of Hugo's work to a modern audience.

The discussion of visual details with significant symbolism going unused or misunderstood in adaptation relates to the larger question of how an adaptation can effectively communicate with a new audience while respecting the intentions of the original work, and what new visual languages could be created to bridge this divide. Expressing an interpretation of

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[6] Bellos, *Novel of the Century*, 30.
[7] Bellos, 55-6.
[8] Bellos, 58-9.

Hugo's work relevant to this study's focus, Bellos also addresses the ideologies of the student insurgents compared with Hugo's own political beliefs. He questions whether the readers are meant to support the rebellion or be warned against its violence, while still romanticizing the insurgents' abstract ideals.[9] This ambiguity around the rebellion is heightened in adaptations, and audiences can come away with different views depending on the methods used to characterize the rebellion, complicating any assessment of to what degree audience members might empathize with the insurgents.

Methods and Perspectives in Analysis of Adaptations

In considering adaptations of *Les Misérables* and their effects on their audiences across the range of decades that they have existed, adapted sources from various periods must be taken into account. Lester Asheim's 1951 *From Book to Film* presents a quantitative study of the trends among screen adaptations of classic novels; Richard Boleslawski's 1935 film of *Les Misérables* is among those studied. Asheim discusses how, where the original books might have been written to provoke discomfort, film adaptations, in the interest of profit, aim to leave their audience feeling satisfied and content with their place in the world:[10]the stories in American adaptations are placed into a more conventional mold,[11] constructed so as to remove or resolve any imperative for the audience.[12] This is largely accomplished by taking nuanced societal problems and reducing them down to individual matters that can be neatly resolved by the end of the

[9] Bellos, *Novel of the Century*, 200.
[10] Lester Asheim, "From Book to Film: The Note of Affirmation," *The Quarterly of Film Radio and Television* 6, no. 1 (Fall 1951): 62, https://doi.org/10.2307/1209935.
[11] Delphine Gleizes, "Adapting *Les Misérables* for the Screen: Transatlantic Debates and Rivalries," trans. Stacie Allan, in Les Misérables *and Its Afterlives: Between Page, Stage, and Screen*, ed. Bradley Stephens and Kathryn M. Grossman (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2015), 134.
[12] Asheim, "Note of Affirmation," 63.

movie.[13] Thus, in order to appeal to American middle-class sensibilities, Asheim believes the 1935 adaptation downplayed the political significance of the original material.[14] This analysis is especially relevant to the changes made in other American adaptations of *Les Misérables*, and it aids in determining why politically charged moments in the story become trivialized or, conversely, magnified. Overall, Asheim's study has provided accounts of the most common motivations behind changes in adaptation that contribute to a work's depoliticization, especially regarding the methods by which adaptations revise potentially controversial material.

In order to determine the place of *Les Misérables* and its adaptations in today's world, its most well-known adaptation, the stage musical by Alain Boublil and Claude-Michel Schönberg, must be considered. In their chapter from *The Oxford Handbook of the British Musical*, "*Les Misérables*: From Epic Novel to Epic Musical", Kathryn M. Grossman and Bradley Stephens discuss the musical's value as an adaptation, including the changes it makes to Hugo's work and how its message resonates with its audience. The musical softens the explicitly political aspects of Hugo's story, skimming over historical context, in favor of reaching the audience through an emotional avenue[15] that prioritizes spirituality,[16] pathos, and theatrical spectacle.[17] The authors argue that, though many of Hugo's characters are flattened[18] and specific political grievances are absent, the musical still effectively represents the emotional impact and sublime Romantic experience Hugo wanted his readers to experience.[19]

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[13] Lester Asheim, "From Book to Film: Mass Appeals," *Hollywood Quarterly* 5, no. 4 (Summer 1951): 335-36, https://doi.org/10.2307/1209613.
[14] Asheim, "Mass Appeals," 337.
[15] Kathryn M. Grossman and Bradley Stephens, "*Les Misérables*: From Epic Novel to Epic Musical," in *The Oxford Handbook of the British Musical*, ed. Robert Gordon and Olaf Jubin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 383.
[16] Grossman and Stephens, "Epic Novel," 386.
[17] Grossman and Stephens, 396.
[18] Grossman and Stephens, 389.
[19] Grossman and Stephens, "Epic Novel," 398.

The authors also mention specifically the potential for inspiration created by the musical's rousing revolutionary anthems. The students' abstract ideals are connected to the story's other characters as the people whose problems the insurgents are fighting to solve,[20] thereby affirming their importance in rounding out the story's message. This interpretation of the musical argues that adaptations need not necessarily entirely reproduce historical and political context so long as they sufficiently communicate the need for change in the world or reach audience members with an impactful and resonant message.

Lastly, Bradley Stephens's presentation "When Is an Adaptation Not an Adaptation? *Les Misérables* and the Contested Art of Storytelling" questions the standards on which adaptations are judged and asserts the worth of *Les Misérables* as a timeless cultural influence beyond the simple words of the text. Stephens, as others have, points out how the universality of *Les Misérables* makes it an ideal candidate for timely reinterpretations and adaptations.[21] It was, after all, Hugo's intent for the story to be likened to a vast range of human experiences,[22] and even, as Grossman discusses, to be retold in ways that bring out its relevance and emotional impact.[23] *Les Misérables* is, therefore, a useful work to examine as a case study in adaptation and all the different ways in which a work can be transposed for a new audience.[24] Stephens asserts that, since every adaptation represents a different facet of the original and even the most faithful of adaptations cannot replicate the book, adaptations should be valued based on creativity and success in communicating with their audiences, not on fidelity.[25] The story, as one that changes in meaning throughout the years but does not cease to be important (as Hugo's preface states, "as

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[20] Grossman and Stephens, 395.
[21] Bradley Stephens, "When Is an Adaptation Not an Adaptation? 'Les Misérables' and the Contested Art of Storytelling" (lecture, Barricades: A Les Mis Convention, April 22, 2022).
[22] Bellos, *Novel of the Century*, xvi.
[23] Grossman, "Popularizing Hugo," 489.
[24] Stephens, "Contested Art of Storytelling."
[25] Stephens, "Contested Art of Storytelling."

long as there are ignorance and poverty on earth, books of this kind may serve some purpose"[26]), is at its best when both retaining its universal appeal and personalized for each interpreter, or even each viewer.[27] Stephens analyzes the different ways in which three adaptations have approached their task, and concludes that what makes a more effective adaptation is innovation that changes the story in a way that resonates with its particular audience, not diluting the story for mainstream appeal. As such, it is not simply removal of the facts of the book and its historical context that leeches an adaptation of its meaning, but the elimination of important elements without consideration of a way to reimagine their significance.[28] Therefore, in adaptations of *Les Misérables*, the deep meaning that makes the book so important is not best replicated through utter fidelity nor through catering to the perceived tastes of a modern audience, but through focalizing the most intriguing and relevant aspects of Hugo's work.

Summary

It is evident that the journey of *Les Misérables* supplies a powerful demonstration of how adaptations can revitalize a work for the modern day, or reduce it down to a plot so conventional that the barest hints of social critique are neutralized. As the work remains relevant to contemporary issues, the potential value of a study examining the political implications of changes made throughout the story's incarnations across media is clear. Though the consistent emotional thread through Hugo's work and its adaptations is worth preserving, the frequent lack of specific detail on political matters indicates the neglect of an equally integral aspect of the story.

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[26] Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, trans. Christine Donougher (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2013), 2.
[27] Stephens, "Contested Art of Storytelling."
[28] Stephens, "Contested Art of Storytelling."

The significance of the June Rebellion and its barricades in the story's message and overall structure is often cut down in adaptation or skimmed over in scholarly work, but it can be argued to be the purest distillation of *Les Misérables* to be identified throughout the story's action. Therefore, though previous studies of *Les Misérables* and its reimaginings have focused on more general analysis of how each aspect of the story is presented and how Hugo's many intentions are communicated, this study aims to provide more focused assertions on the political nature of adaptations through the specific example of the oft-overlooked barricades.

Through studying the politically loaded subject of the June Rebellion and its portrayal in adaptation, this project hopes to shed light more generally on popular opinions regarding revolt and the futility of working towards change. A dilution of the rebellion's ideals, especially in film adaptations, may show a desire to concede to the perceived viewpoints of the majority of audience members, and reveals how media hoping to reach a wider audience is inclined to stay away from potentially controversial or discomforting political statements.[29] Adaptations of *Les Misérables* demonstrate a trend of avoiding the systemic factors that led to the issues presented in the story, instead presenting each problem as a solvable individual one.[30] This reduction mirrors many people's beliefs regarding social issues as a matter of individual misfortune or ineptitude, not larger issues built into society. Many adaptations go even further, placing so much emphasis on the historical and fictional nature of events that audience members fail to acknowledge the relevance to the issues of today's world or the call to action that runs through the story's development.[31] By addressing the biases towards depoliticization or popular opinion that come into play during the adaptation process, this study hopes to provoke reexamination of

[29] Lester Asheim, "From Book to Film: Summary," *The Quarterly of Film Radio and Television* 6, no. 3 (Spring 1952): 273, https://doi.org/10.2307/1209848.
[30] Asheim, "Mass Appeals," 337.
[31] Gleizes, "Adapting *Les Misérables*," 140.

the audience's close relationship to the events and ideas of *Les Misérables*, encouraging them to think more critically about what they are shown.

Methods

Primary Sources

In its study of adaptations of *Les Misérables*, this project focuses on film and television adaptations as well as the popular stage musical. Each adaptation analyzed contains both auditory and visual components. Adaptations within these realms face pressure to condense the story into a watchable length, as well as to exert some degree of creative license over the original work as a demonstration of talent. Stage and screen adaptations are also motivated by marketability to a greater degree than many adaptations in other forms, since their high production costs mean that their creators must also strive to draw in a large audience. Thus, the influence of perceived popular opinion will exert a greater influence on these adaptations.[32] With clear messaging and a simplified plot, these popular adaptations are likely to prioritize making the story accessible, and palatable to their target audiences. Overall, these adaptations tend to be the ones most affected by the pressures of the industry while still providing room for adapters to act creatively and push their audiences to think.

This study analyzes both adaptations with significant cultural impact and artistically innovative but less widely acclaimed adaptations. Adaptations in either category are likely to be the farthest-reaching and therefore more impactful on audiences' opinions of the work. This project examines mainly the more well-known Anglophone and Francophone adaptations of *Les Misérables*. This study also limits itself to adaptations set in the historical time period of *Les Misérables* and staying reasonably within the plot structure of the book, so as to more effectively

[32] Asheim, "Mass Appeals," 334.

compare their approaches to portraying the barricades of the historical June Rebellion. The twelve adaptations this project addresses, listed at the end of this paper, were created in France, the United Kingdom, and the United States, and the years of their creation range from 1925 to 2018. The focus is film and television, but the stage musical by Alain Boublil and Claude-Michel Schönberg is included, as well as the subsequent movie version directed by Tom Hooper, because it has had a vast cultural impact on views of the novel and on succeeding adaptations during the years after the musical's creation.

In this selection of the most impactful, most creative, and most interestingly contrasting film adaptations, this study includes adaptations from a variety of places, years, and intentions behind the creation. The study documents and compares accessible adaptations with politically relevant content and compelling material for analysis. It also analyzes commonalities among adaptational choices and their effects within the selection of popular or impactful adaptations.

Materials

In order to effectively analyze each adaptation, this project also utilizes further primary source materials in order to situate adaptations within the political and cultural context of their creation and of Hugo's original work. In an effort to understand the historical basis of Hugo's novel, this project integrates sources relating to the historical context of the June Rebellion. Analysis of these sources provides for assessment of how Hugo modified historical fact and how adaptations reincorporate historical details into the story or further stray from the facts of the rebellion. Other historical influences on Hugo's text—mainly his own experiences with revolution and the political climate in which he was writing *Les Misérables*—are also taken into

account, so the original work and its context can be fully understood when delving into how adaptations make modifications.

Study Procedure

This section outlines the steps that this project takes in collecting and analyzing data from each adaptation viewed. First, detailed notes were taken on each adaptation watched, paying special attention to factors including: major deviations from the original depiction of the barricades in the form of content that directly contradicts the plot, characterization, or ideas of the source material; the inclusion, or lack thereof, of political/historical context and revolutionary symbols; the language and visuals used around the rebellion; and the portrayal of the revolutionaries' personalities, especially regarding to what extent they are humanized and therefore more capable of provoking audience sympathy. A condensed general idea of what each adaptation was trying to impart to its audience regarding the rebellion and its participants was inferred, taking into account the techniques used to convey this message. Provided with these general statements of intention, the adaptations were compared and grouped into like-approaches and then selected for more in-depth analysis depending on which offered the most compelling contrasts in their ideas and how they were communicated.

Results

This project seeks to categorize different approaches to adapting the rebellion and identify the effects of the changes made on the audience's view of the rebellion. Three exemplar adaptations were chosen as representative of the trends that occur in others; the project primarily discusses these adaptations and uses them to illustrate different approaches that adaptations tend

to take in adapting Hugo's barricades, demonstrating how political messages are reinterpreted and displayed differently in adaptation. Many commonalities exist throughout the adaptations from which data was gathered. Most adaptations — especially American films, which tend to be shorter and more focused on appealing to their audience than faithfully adapting the source material[33] — minimize the time spent on the rebellion while focusing primarily on Jean Valjean and his conflict with Javert. Many adaptations also increase Marius Pontmercy's level of political engagement[34] so that the rebellion appears more directly relevant to the main plot and the audience is more likely to sympathize with the insurgents. Adaptations also cue their audiences in to the nature of the insurgents' political ideals by including various types of historically inspired revolutionary imagery usually connected with the French Revolution, a choice that can help contextualize the rebellion but that can also confuse audience members unfamiliar with the historical nuances of the June Rebellion.

Through analyzing this imagery, the historical context provided, the appearance of the barricade, and the characterization of the insurgents and their leadership, three rough groupings of approaches to adapting the barricades emerge: justifying the rebellion through historical means, justifying it through emotional means, and failing to justify it at all. Most adaptations aim to have the audience sympathize with the insurgents; this is achieved either through including factual historical details that justify the logic behind the uprising, or through appealing to the audience's emotions by emphasizing the insurgents' camaraderie and tragic idealism. Both approaches have their advantages and disadvantages in communicating the rebellion's significance to the audience: emphasis on the rebellion's logic allows audience members to make their own judgments and connections, but the historical distance makes it challenging for them to

[33] Gleizes, "Adapting *Les Misérables*," 134.
[34] Grossman and Stephens, "Epic Novel," 394.

relate to the students and their cause. On the other hand, emphasis on its emotional aspects garners the greatest degree of empathy, but the frequent vagueness of the rebellion's motivations reduces clarity in connecting their historical conflicts to those of the modern world. In the final approach, the audience struggles to sympathize with the rebellion at all, from either a warped depiction of the rebellion as a random outburst of senseless violence or from so little time spent on it that no firm justification for the uprising can be identified.

Each of the twelve adaptations included in this project has been placed into one of these three categories; not all are a perfect fit, as most categorization tends to be somewhat reductive, but the rough groupings aid in organizing the argument and identifying trends in adaptation. Within each grouping of approaches to justification, discussion of the different tactics used to characterize the rebellion will be focused on one adaptation which serves as an example of trends in the others. The adaptation in each group with the strongest commitment to its approach to justification is selected as its exemplar, and other adaptations within the three groups will be discussed as is necessary to further elaborate on a point. Jean-Paul le Chanois's 1958 film will represent the historically justified approach; Alain Boublil and Claude-Michel Schönberg's 1985 musical will represent the emotionally justified approach; and Richard Boleslawski's 1935 film will represent the insufficiently justified approach. Analyzing the differences among the rebellion's depictions in these adaptations will demonstrate how different methods and signals used to characterize the rebellion aid in provoking audience sympathy by appealing to logical or emotional factors, or dissuade the audience from sympathizing with the insurgents by making both logical and emotional aspects unclear.

Exposition and Historical Context

In adaptations that justify the uprising with historical context, the most important consideration is that the audience understands why the insurgents are rebelling. In the novel, Hugo accomplishes this with the voice of the narrator to recount events leading up to the rebellion. Adaptations taking the historical approach approximate this exposition by including speeches from the students declaring their grievances with the current situation in France and their goals for the future. The Le Chanois film includes explanations from a narrator — omitting much of Hugo's artistic flair — on the political climate in France following the July Revolution of 1830, also including a revolutionary Marius repeating Marxist rhetoric to Éponine and a patriotic speech from Enjolras on freedom in France. Other adaptations in this vein also insert convenient speeches from the students summarizing their complaints and their ideals, such as Marius's information-loaded spiel on the king's injustices in the 1998 Bille August movie. Marcel Bluwal's 1972 television series also uses a narrator to explain events. These adaptations emphasize specific historical facts, clarifying that Les Amis de l'ABC are dissatisfied with the rule of King Louis-Philippe and are fighting to create a republic. Their students list complaints and aspirations, allowing the audience to connect them to their own historical knowledge or current beliefs. Because these adaptations go into detail on the political situation, the audience understands the logic behind the rebellion and feels that the fight is justified even if they may not be personally invested in the outcome.

Adaptations looking to connect on an emotional level, however, avoid giving their audience too many details on the rebellion in favor of drawing on a more general anger at a failing system. The popular 1985 stage musical produced by Cameron Mackintosh provides only very minor background on the rebellion. The musical trusts its audience to assume that,

participating in an uprising in France, the students are probably fighting against the rule of a corrupt monarch, but nowhere in the libretto is it actually confirmed that France has a king. Many viewers, in fact, come away believing that they have just watched a musical about the French Revolution. While this robs the story of the impact of the particular ideas associated with the historical June Rebellion, this mistaken assumption keeps this adaptation's main angle, the emotional impact of the rebellion, intact and effective. Marius states that "Only one man, and that's Lamarque / Speaks for the people here below," and Lamarque's death is later used as a rallying call for the people of Paris, but the musical provides little further political context. The insurgents' goals are unclear, but from the poverty and hunger shown in other scenes and during their entrance, it can be reasonably assumed that they are trying to improve the dismal conditions that have so greatly affected the other characters.

In place of factual context, the musical uses optimistic language around the rebellion to paint it as an inevitability given the current situation and as being desired by the majority of people. The lines sung by an ensemble of beggars right before Marius and Enjolras enter — "When's it gonna end? / When we gonna live? / Something's gotta happen now or / Something's gotta give / It'll come, it'll come, it'll come…" — convey an image of tension building up to a breaking point, justifying the outburst of rebellion purely on the basis of the strong emotion displayed and the hardship suffered by the people. Furthermore, the musical uses flowery descriptive language to its advantage in ways inaccessible to other forms of adaptation; the rebellion is frequently referred to with figures of speech invoking natural forces: "Like the flowing of the tide / Paris coming to our side" or "One more day before the storm." By using this language for the rebellion, the musical characterizes it similarly to how Hugo himself does: not as a jarring disruption to an existing order, but as itself being part of a greater natural order. With

the political circumstances in France causing so much hardship, it seems both right and inevitable that rebellion should break out. Thus, the musical portrays the motivation behind the rebellion from an emotional angle, using figurative language to gain the audience's approval. The snippets of information it does provide connect to universally understood grievances and more generalized ideas of injustice. The responsibility ultimately falls to the audience members to think critically about the material and apply its ideas to the issues of their own world, but the rebellion nevertheless is likely to gain their support due to its characterization as an unstoppable force manifesting the desires of all France's people.

Adaptations that fail, intentionally or not, to justify the rebellion for their audience usually include little historical context, if any. The Boleslawski film's uprising is entirely removed from the original context, replacing Hugo's Les Amis de l'ABC with the Student Society for Law Reform. The effort is divided between a painfully centrist Marius, obscurely advocating for both more humane sentences for prisoners and stricter control of crime, and a vicious Enjolras demanding violence. Changed into a different cause entirely, this rebellion speaks more to potential fears of dangerous riots rather than replicating historical events or Hugo's narrative. Context and justifications are excluded, causing the rebellion to appear as more a backdrop of senseless violence against which Jean Valjean struggles, rather than a complex issue of its own. Audience members are not given any specific details to which they may feel a personal connection, so the lack of information of any type is most likely to produce a negative view of the rebellion as an unjustified riot.

The Barricade and Other Visual Symbols

The appearance of the barricade, the "pile of ideas and…of woes"[35] on which Hugo's insurgents play out their dramatic fates, plays a significant role in the overall characterization of the rebellion. Historically, and in Hugo's novel, the barricades were built strategically. For example, rows of paving stones were arranged like stairs on the inside so that the fighters could easily ascend to their positions and a mess of broken items on the outside were stacked to absorb the shock of cannon fire and prevent the enemy from climbing up as easily.[36] The Le Chanois film and other historically faithful adaptations replicate this style of construction: the barricade is a tall, structurally stable blockade made mostly of paving stones, difficult for the National Guardsmen to scale. The focus is on the barricade's stability and impregnability: in the Bluwal series, like in the book, Gavroche advises the students to add broken glass to the front of the barricade to make it even more difficult to breach. The barricades of these historically justified adaptations demonstrate the planning that has gone into the rebellion and indicate the insurgents' previous experience – after all, most of them would have likely participated in the July Revolution two years prior. The insurgents' abilities to strategize are clear: they are fully capable of putting up a fight against the National Guard and French army. These tactical barricades impress upon the audience the insurgents' preparation and capability, showing that the students have planned well for the uprising and are more than young and naïve idealists.

Other visual symbols are mostly kept to flags and posters displaying revolutionary slogans, with a few visual references to the French Revolution: cockades, Phrygian caps, and other pieces of revolutionary apparel are relatively scarce. By referring mainly to the ideals of

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[35]Hugo, *Les Misérables*, 1070.
[36] Hugo, *Les Misérables*, 993.

the French Revolution, rather than replicating its visuals, the rebellion demonstrates a continuation of those ideals but is kept separate from the actual event. To illustrate, the Le Chanois film emphasizes the phrase "Vivent les Peuples" carved into the wall and the insurgents' action of replacing their red flag with the coat of the martyred Mabeuf. The uprising pays due tribute to the ideals and language of its predecessor but develops its own slogans and visual language, displaying both the insurgents' capability of forming their own plans and ideas, and the unique place in history they occupy.

The barricades of the emotionally-focused adaptations usually do not demonstrate strategic construction, instead bringing out the symbolic quality of the barricade. In the musical, the barricade appears to be built mainly of furniture, barrels, wagon wheels, and other historical embellishments, looking more like a large and haphazard pile than a stable wall. The bright red flag on the barricade's summit stands out against the dark background, representing the persistence of the students' ideals. In the musical's original staging, the barricade revolves on a turntable to display its front side to the audience at crucial moments; in the current revival production, however, there is no turntable: the audience only sees the barricade from the students' side, which creates the perception that they are part of the fight, firmly allied with the insurgents. Tom Hooper's 2012 film version of the musical does not reproduce this staging, but the barricade is similarly haphazardly constructed. Possibly to a greater degree than any other adaptation, this barricade is closer to a pile than a wall, created using furniture thrown down from nearby apartments, including a piano. It is no wonder that this barricade is rather messy – it was built live during filming by the actors. Though emotionally immersive for the creative team, this directorial choice makes it seem as if the students had little plan for what they would do once they overtook Lamarque's funeral. If the barricade discredits the students' strategizing, however,

it certainly emphasizes the symbolic value with the two coffins placed at its front. The barricade of Robert Hossein's 1982 movie is also quite disorderly; its construction can hardly be judged, for all the time that the barricade spends obscured by smoke or actually on fire.

These hulking, chaotic piles bring to mind Hugo's chapter in *Les Misérables* describing the difference between two significant barricades of the Revolution of 1848. He pauses the narrative to compare the gigantic, craggy pile of objects that blocked the Faubourg St-Antoine to the silent, eerily looming wall of paving stones of the Faubourg du Temple, writing that "you sensed in the first barricade the dragon, and behind the second, the sphinx."[37] Similarly, the tactical paving stone blockades of the historically-focused adaptations bring out the logic of the rebellion, while the disheveled piles of the emotionally-focused ones represent the rebellion's energy and passion. In the novel, aspects of both types of barricade are combined to create a setting that resists binary categorization, resulting in a powerful and traditionally Romantic display of multiple facets of the idea of rebellion. However, for adaptations focusing mainly on the emotional angle, the barricade does not need to be technically functional as long as it affects the audience with its symbolic value; indeed, these ones seem to stand isolated from physical reality as representations of the struggle itself, stages for the insurgents to enact their grand sacrifice. A visual manifestation of the different types of people coming together to rebel – as well as the intersection of many characters' plotlines – these haphazard barricades nevertheless resonate with the audience for their ability to visually signify the power of the rebellion and its eventual tragic end.

The emotionally-focused adaptations also make more frequent use of other visual symbols, usually with strong connections to the French Revolution. Along with the red flag, the musical's insurgents typically wear cockades and tricolor sashes, occasionally even red Phrygian

[37] Hugo, *Les Misérables*, 1056.

caps. Those in the Tom Hooper movie are even more bedecked with revolutionary accessories, and both tricolor and red flags appear in vast multitudes in nearly every crowd scene of the insurgents. Andrew Davies's 2018 miniseries also uses this visual shorthand of cockades and tricolor sashes. These adaptations connect their rebellion with immediately recognizable French Revolutionary imagery in order to give their audience, which has received little historical context, a basic idea of the uprising's nature and goals. Instead of focusing on specific ideas, they use visual codes to bring out a general impression of a revolution occurring in France, and rely on their audience to make assumptions about what character that kind of rebellion might have. Through using simpler and more popularly recognized revolutionary imagery, these adaptations encourage their audience to think of the French Revolution and then apply their own knowledge on the subject to inform their impression of the smaller rebellion.

The Boleslawski film, as part of the insufficiently justified grouping, utilizes few of these specificities in its depiction of the barricades. The film features multiple barricades crowded by swarms of fighters. The angry mob carries torches, planks of wood, and even swords, visuals that characterize them as a primitive group driven purely by rage and ill intent. They are fighting not to achieve any specific ideal, but to enact vengeance against others in a show of ruthless violence. The rebellion Hugo described is reduced to a series of citywide riots, robbing the insurgents of their firm location and purpose in order to create conditions of fear and peril which Valjean must struggle through to save Marius. This depiction of the rebellion as a chaotic clash devoid of any reason, strategy, or legitimate motivation serves this adaptation's view of revolt as an unjustifiable danger that harms upright citizens like the barely-involved protagonists. Furthermore, the film does not include a flag or other visual revolutionary symbols, unmooring

the rebellion from a role in history and leaving the audience to make their own inferences given only the violence depicted on screen.

On the other hand, Lewis Milestone's 1952 movie and Glenn Jordan's 1978 film, though in the unjustified category, both use clothing and dialogue that connect their rebellions strongly to the French Revolution. Absent any other information that would characterize the rebellion as its own effort, however, these references do not help the audience understand the uprising beyond its basic context. The visuals are more likely to cue them towards the popularly perceived violence and bloodlust of the French Revolution rather than its lasting ideals. With so little time spent on the rebellion, the audience still struggles to see it as truly justified, and it fades into the background as a mere plot mechanism to affect Valjean and Marius. Thus, these adaptations tend to use very simplistic visual cues, if any, in order to heighten the audience's fear of the uprising's violence and emphasize the peril for the other, more highly prioritized plotlines. The audience comes away with a view of the rebellion as not only pointless, but dangerous and irresponsible.

Characterization of the Insurgents

One of the advantages of Les Amis de l'ABC being a group made up mostly of students is that they can provide eloquent political and ethical discussions on the cause for which they fight. Historically-focused adaptations take advantage of this through highlighting the education of the group and the complexities of their opinions on their ideals. The Le Chanois film characterizes the insurgents as a highly strategic group containing both students and members of the working class. Père Mabeuf is present, not as the soft-spoken lover of plants and old books of

Hugo's novel but as a passionate elderly revolutionary who had fought in the French Revolution, and Marius is much more enthusiastic about the group's politics than he is in the book. These changes add to the adaptation's political emphasis, valorizing the insurgents and adding dialogue to make their cause seem more clearly aligned with socialist ideals. In the Bluwal series, Les Amis de l'ABC are similarly educated and serious about their ideals, but are also shown to be a closely bonded group of good friends, so the audience is encouraged to sympathize with them from the emotional angle as well. Many of these adaptations, which also remain faithful to Hugo's depiction of events, tend to feature individual moments of characterization and conflict for the insurgents, often lifted straight from the novel. Inclusions like Prouvaire's stirringly defiant death scene, Combeferre's attempt to convince Enjolras not to shoot a young guardsman, or Grantaire's skepticism ending in a final enthusiastic acceptance of the students' ideals all serve to humanize the insurgents, illustrate the convictions they possess, and distance them from being perceived as a uniformly angry mob. These individual moments help greatly to encourage the audience's sympathy in adaptations where the insurgents are frequently depicted as highly dignified and businesslike, thus logical but hardly emotionally moving. From the students' nuanced discussions and professional behavior, the audience members understand the intellectual justification for the rebellion, but the occasional moments of individuality and camaraderie are also crucial to ensuring the audience cares about their success as well.

Adaptations focusing on the rebellion's emotional appeal emphasize the students' camaraderie and increase both the anger and the vulnerability that they display. The Mackintosh musical's students are still a group of intellectuals, but they demonstrate a fiery passion for their cause, eager to martyr themselves for a higher purpose. They are quick to express emotion, displaying enthusiasm for the battle and sincere love for each other. Easily joking around and

sharing close contemplative moments, like in the poignant song "Drink with Me," they are nearly as much a friend group as they are a political organization. Though this group dynamic might not be historically accurate, it is faithful to Hugo's portrayal of the Amis de l'ABC, who have at least as much in common with his own literary societies as they do with actual revolutionary groups.[38] Furthermore, their revolutionary songs frequently use the second person, and the reprise of "Do You Hear the People Sing?" addresses the audience in an unmistakable call to action. The audience may feel as if they are on the insurgents' side because of how familiar and human the students feel and because of the implication that the audience is part of the students' effort.

The dynamic is somewhat less optimistic with the students of Davies's emotionally-justified series. As a group featuring only four of Hugo's students who casually arrive at a barricade seemingly accompanied by strangers, their commitment appears wavering until the moment of the actual rebellion. The audience's connection to them is not gained so much through their passion, but through their vulnerability: young and inexperienced, Davies's insurgents have a hard time coming to terms with the fate that awaits them on the barricades. Moments of doubt such as these make the insurgents touchingly human, but sometimes lessen the seriousness of their commitment to the fight. The fierce resolve to die as martyrs displayed in other moments, however, garners audience sympathy to a similar degree as the tragedy of a noble sacrifice makes its impact. Humanizing the insurgents in this manner – especially with the inclusion of jokes and teasing to establish the friendship they share – makes them relatable for audience members, and, thus, encourages the audience to support their cause. The emphasis on their closeness and their feelings regarding the uprising, be they anxiety or enthusiasm, help the

[38] Midautumnnightdream, Aflamethatneverdies, and PilferingApples, "French Romanticism 101" (lecture, Barricades: A Les Mis Convention, April 23, 2022).

audience members connect to the insurgents on an emotional level, regardless of whether they understand or agree with the insurgents' ideals.

Certain adaptations fail to effectively justify the rebellion because allowing the insurgents little individual characterization results in the story's personalities becoming unrelatable. As mentioned, the insurgents of the Boleslawski film are a disorganized mob, engaging in violence with few individual characteristics or motivations. The insurgents take part in no actions apart from violent rioting, as the nature of their fight is defined only where it is relevant to other plotlines. The Jordan movie attempts to add some justification to the rebellion with a speech in the square from Enjolras, but the flat delivery of a repetitive collection of generic slogans does little to help the audience actually understand the reasons for the fight. Encountering the rebellion only where it intersects with other characters and acquiring no understanding of what sort of people the insurgents are, audience members end up seeing the uprising only as a plot device, without the comprehension of how this revolt is a vital aspect of the message of *Les Misérables*.

Enjolras and the Rebellion's Leadership

In the novel, the austere leader of the rebellion, Enjolras, provides a major part of the rebellion's characterization with his uncompromising devotion to its ideals and his confident guidance of the others' efforts. Though taciturn and often willing to let his companions take the lead instead, Enjolras provides the insurgents with firm leadership, commanding attention when he speaks and directing the others to do what is necessary for their cause. The readers receive the impression of Enjolras as a skilled, resolute leader. He is so single-minded and ideologically pure that he appears almost inhuman. However, through moving moments of melancholy or affection

for his companions and a death scene that illustrates his personal bond with Grantaire as much as it does his martyrdom, readers sympathize with him as an individual as well as trusting in the conviction of his ideals.

In order to emphasize the strategy behind the rebellion, historically-focused adaptations tend to characterize Enjolras as extremely pragmatic and efficient. The Enjolras of the Le Chanois film, played by Serge Reggiani, is clean-cut and practical, giving out orders and organizing the others while still allowing a few moments of tenderness. He treats the rebellion like a business meeting, going about even its acts of violence with cool rationality. In Henri Fescourt's 1925 silent film series, Paul Guidé's Enjolras, close to Hugo's version of the character, is even colder. He leads the insurgents with a calm but fierce intensity, and executes the police spy Le Cabuc without a hint of regret, showing just how focused he is on the singular purpose of the uprising. These adaptations emphasize Enjolras as an unshakeable leader attuned to the logical side of the rebellion who can clearly guide the other insurgents. He speaks only when necessary and does not boast his status as leader, but the group automatically heeds his commands and recognizes his intelligence and authority. Though he is not loud or brash, he is resolute in his actions and firm in his ideals. His icy commitment, to which the audience may have difficulty finding personal connection, can come across as fanatical. Still, the audience can empathize with him if his revolutionary zeal is tempered by moments of sincere and heartfelt connection with his friends, like it is in the novel. This type of Enjolras is a leader that the audience can respect, demonstrating powerful resolve and strategic input. Through this depiction of the rebellion's leader, audience members are likely to perceive the insurgents as a highly prepared, cohesive group, possibly intimidating in their commitment but aware of what it will take to accomplish their goal.

In Mackintosh's musical and other more emotionally-focused adaptations, Enjolras fits more with popular character tropes of the typical passionate and courageous revolutionary leader. He is full of righteous fury and perpetually energized, offering encouragement to his friends in the form of heartening hand clasps or solos demonstrating his unwavering fervor. He is immediately recognizable as the leader, standing out from the crowd in a flashy red and gold vest that would feel quite out of place on the more sensibly dressed versions of Enjolras that feature in most other adaptations. Though he shares a close bond with his friends, he often struggles to keep them on track when they would rather casually joke about Marius's romantic exploits than prepare for the uprising. This more passionate and outgoing characterization is maintained in the Hooper movie, whose exasperated Enjolras often seems like the only one taking the rebellion seriously. This defiant Enjolras, portrayed by Aaron Tveit, gains the audience's sympathy with his moments of emotional vulnerability, showing flickers of fear as the National Guardsmen breach the barricades and anguish at the deaths of his compatriots.

Joseph Quinn's Enjolras in the Davies series shows even more distress during the battle, and often struggles to be heard by his fellow insurgents. Indignant but relatively inexperienced, his position as a leader is questionable, as he is barely listened to even by his two friends, who would also prefer to talk about Marius's love life. These portrayals of Enjolras as a young and uncertain leader do not give the insurgents much credit for their strategy, but they add to the angle emphasizing the insurgents' innocence and therefore the tragedy of their deaths. A louder, more conventional leader works as shorthand for the audience to instantly recognize to whom they should be paying attention, and the moments of vulnerability drive home the impact of his martyrdom. Even if the audience cannot identify the specifics of the students' cause, they can

relate to the passion and anger expressed, and they sympathize with Enjolras, perhaps less for his skill for leadership but certainly for his tragic fate.

The Boleslawski film, lacking justification, takes care to portray Enjolras in a way that prevents the audience from sympathizing with him on any grounds. Lit fearsomely from underneath, the overzealous revolutionary, played by John Carradine, gives a speech inciting the group to violence with such lines as: “We’ll tear up the streets of Paris! If they’ve got bayonets, we’ve got knives!” The group cheers and grabs furniture for the barricades, and the violent riot that stands for this adaptation’s June Rebellion overtakes the streets, with Enjolras never appearing again. This Enjolras represents the dark side of revolt that the audience is cautioned against: pure, vitriolic violence, with no justification or legitimate complaint behind it. The vehement performance coupled with the dramatic lighting characterize this Enjolras as a clear villain – more obviously so, even, than this adaptation’s tragically soulful Javert. The obfuscating Marius presents the more rational alternative to Enjolras’s ideals: moderate, incremental change achieved by talking politely and waiting patiently. Enjolras is reduced to a barely significant character, as any greater presence or elaboration on his ideals would move in the direction of justifying the uprising to the audience. The audience is wary of his leadership and alarmed by the aggression he represents, and is, thus, encouraged to be afraid of any uprising or movement to achieve change. This adaptation characterizes its Enjolras as irrational and nefarious, thereby leading its audience to fear the actions and ideals of the uprising.

Conclusion

Through the strategies used in various adaptations to provide the audience with different impressions of the rebellion, it becomes clear that both the historical and emotional approaches

have merits and disadvantages while adaptations that do not justify the rebellion are mainly reductive in their depictions of it. Adaptations that utilize historical details and elaborate on the students' goals ensure that the uprising appears as a justified course of action. If the audience members are willing to think critically, they can make connections to issues that persist in their own world, and they can understand the rebellion as a historical event worth learning about even if it did not succeed. However, the audience is not necessarily encouraged to take the students' side: audience members may see the issues addressed in the rebellion as purely historical conflicts, and they feel no obligation to incorporate the principles for which the insurgents fight into their own lives.

Adaptations that prioritize humanizing the insurgents by bringing out their friendship with each other and their passion for their cause get the audience more closely involved. Audience members feel empathy for the students as individual characters, relating to their camaraderie, their righteous anger, and their anxieties. They are invested in the students and their cause, even feeling involved in the fight themselves, but they might not be certain what that fight is about. Though the insurgents' ideals are evident, their specific goals are often unclear, so audience members see the rebellion in an abstract sense, separated from the political context of its period in a way that, again, makes it difficult for audience members to instantly see the relevance to their own lives. Additionally, the purely emotional angle often means that the greatest impression the audience receives is the tragic nature of the insurgents' deaths, in an interpretation that verges on mourning the rebellion as pointless. When Hugo's original message to his readers that the rebellion was worth fighting regardless and that its participants still achieve a defiant triumph against their foes, these adaptations seem to take on an unfortunately fatalistic view of the material. Still, the emotionally-focused approach allows for much greater

nuance and more meaningful impact on the audience than those that fail to justify the rebellion altogether.

Adaptations that do not encourage their audiences to sympathize with the rebellion reduce the rebellion to a minor role in the story and provide little detail regarding its participants or its historical context. They remove or change key information to favor the view that rebellion is always violent and is never a truly effective means to change society. With the dismissal of the rebellion's significance in the story, audience members may receive the impression that larger systems are not at fault for the suffering that people experience or that it is fruitless to try to change them. As long as some details of the rebellion's representation in the book are preserved or effectively modified, audience members are able to connect with the insurgents and absorb some motivation to fight for change in their own lives. However, the reduction of the rebellion to a minor episode or plot device also robs the overall story of a great portion of its significance. Ideally, adaptations should be able to balance both historical context and the development of relatable characters to allow their audience to fully understand the significance of the rebellion to both Hugo's narrative and the contemporary world.

Through close-reading details such as those addressed, viewers can refine their perception of what is being communicated to them and how it is conveyed. Understanding and interpreting different signals is an important part of being able to critically consume works of fiction as a matter of understanding not just how certain scenes made one feel, but how such emotional impact was accomplished and why the creators might want them to feel that way. This is especially important in cases like those addressed in this project: adaptations constitute a form of communication with the source material, and the changes they make indicate what sort of response they are trying to create. Understanding why different changes are made helps in

assessing what overall message the adaptation is trying to get across about the source material and its ideas; this understanding is key when considering works depicting politically controversial topics or reproductions of historical events. By analyzing and interpreting different types of signals and their impacts on the audience, viewers will thereby be able to hone their perceptive skills and regard any work that produces strong emotion in them with a critical eye.

Limitations

Due to the time constraints of the project and the inaccessibility of many adaptations to the researcher, this project cannot account for all adaptations of *Les Misérables*. Limited by the availability of adaptations and the researcher's language proficiencies, this project does not include many older adaptations or adaptations from countries other than France, the United States, and the United Kingdom. This project also does not include adaptations in formats besides film, television, or stage. Adaptations in other mediums are equally important to the overall history of adaptation of *Les Misérables*, for different conventions and factors influence their creation. This project is also focused on adaptations that stick closely to Hugo's storyline and ascribe to or imitate the setting of the original. Adaptations such as Claude Lelouch's 1995 film — or even Ladj Ly's 2019 film, which claims no connection to Hugo's work but shares its title and deals with similar topics — engage with Hugo's story and themes in fascinating ways that emphasize their relevance to more modern issues while not directly following the source material. These adaptations, and others that do not include the rebellion, cannot be included in the pool of adaptations studied, as they diverge from this project's main focus. This study also does not weight adaptations according to cultural impact. Each adaptation is discussed as is relevant to the project, not according to concrete impact on real viewers. Because of the project's focus on the barricade section, many otherwise impactful adaptations are not analyzed in great

depth due to the frequency of reduction or glossing over the barricades in adaptation. Adaptations selected based on presence of the barricades, therefore, cannot be weighted according to cultural importance, so contemporary reactions do not comprise a significant part of this study.

Lastly, the results of this study should not be interpreted as representative of all adaptations of *Les Misérables*. The nature of the adaptations selected — based largely on which are most accessible to a viewer in the United States — means that they all have a higher chance of taking a certain approach; adaptations popular among a mainstream American audience are likely to have held back on more radical ideas or more controversial takes on the source material. Therefore, while this study analyzes common trends within the group of adaptations, it should not be taken as a measure of the frequency of those trends in a wider context. While in some cases, the study uses quantifiable measures of what is and is not included in adaptation, analysis of certain topics will depend on qualitative judgment and inference, and actual audience reactions were not taken into account. Therefore, the conclusions of this paper are open to debate, and the evidence could be differently interpreted in service of a contrasting argument.

Areas for Further Research

As mentioned in the previous section, this project only addresses a select number of adaptations and analyzes them only within certain bounds. Future projects would benefit from accessing a greater number of adaptations to analyze to determine if the patterns identified remain constant. *Les Misérables* has been adapted into many different forms beyond the stage and screen, so the focus group could be expanded to include audio dramas, animated movies and television series, lesser-known stage adaptations and non-replica productions of the musical, and

graphic novel and manga adaptations. These different media would provide many more areas of consideration in analysis. Many tend to be independently produced, aligning with the ideas of a small group of people rather than attempting to appeal to as many as possible, so their different motivations could result in unexpected interpretations of the novel's events. These forms also face different limitations than those addressed here: while filmed adaptations use both auditory and visual components to illustrate the novel's events, audio dramas and illustrated versions are more restricted. There are different conventions associated with these forms, and all must use different techniques to get the same messages across. This study could benefit from an expansion to include innovative adaptations in these other forms, such as Arai Takahiro's manga series, which uses extended sequences of dramatic visual metaphors to display characters' internal turmoil; the 2007 anime adaptation *Shoujo Cosette*, which focuses on Cosette as a protagonist and includes side adventures diverging from the main plot; or the Dallas Theatre Center's non-replica production of the musical, which keeps the lyrics and orchestration the same but uses modernized sets, costumes, and choreography and diverse casting to make explicit the story's resonance with present-day issues. Such adaptations provide fascinating new takes on the source material, and could make for substantial analysis addressing the effects of their creative approaches.

Additionally, further research could explore the motivations behind the making of the adaptations noted. This study focuses on the hypothetical effects of the choices made in these adaptations, but an alternate project could instead choose to analyze the reasons these choices were made. By researching the political climate of the time, place in which the adaptations were made, and intentions cited by the adapters, a project could use the wealth of *Les Misérables* adaptations available to draw conclusions as to how the circumstances of creation influence the

changes an adaptation makes to its source material. Furthermore, research could be conducted into how adaptations were received by their audiences, to determine concrete impact and the actual effect of their political messages.

Lastly, research into the existing adaptations of *Les Misérables* provides opportunities for creative work as well as research. Through determining what approaches exist in adaptation, and which are most effective while others could be further built upon, techniques and concepts can be identified for use in the creation of new adaptations. An assessment of what is frequently overlooked in adaptation draws attention to the possibility of new versions that address the shortcomings identified and display an original interpretation of the source material. Following the completion of this project, plans will be made for a new stage adaptation focusing on the barricade section, its characters, and their ideals. It is the hope that more adaptations will emerge in the coming years that do not just amend the source material to make it more palatable for a general audience but engage with it to make revisions that help the audience connect to the original concepts and bring to light previously overlooked or underappreciated aspects of the original work. Through such innovative methods of adaptation, audiences can better understand the work's relevance to their own lives and feel greater empathy for its characters, their hardships, and their ideals.

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Appendix 1: List of Adaptations

Year	Director/Creator	Country of Origin	Format	Categorization
1925	Henri Fescourt	France	Four part silent film series	Historically justified
1934	Raymond Bernard	France	Three part black-and-white film series	Historically justified
1935	Richard Boleslawski	US	Black-and-white film	Unjustified
1952	Lewis Milestone	US	Black-and-white film	Unjustified
1958	Jean-Paul le Chanois	France/Italy/East Germany	Movie	Historically justified
1972	Marcel Bluwal	France	Television series	Historically justified
1978	Glenn Jordan	UK	Movie	Unjustified
1980/5	Alain Boublil, Claude-Michel Schönberg, Herbert Kretzmer	France/UK	Stage Musical	Emotionally justified
1982	Robert Hossein	France/West Germany	Movie	Emotionally justified
1998	Bille August	US/UK/Germany	Movie	Historically justified
2012	Tom Hooper	US/UK	Movie Musical	Emotionally justified
2018	Andrew Davies	UK	Television series	Emotionally justified