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Dramatic Publishing

LES MISÉRABLES

A Full-Length Drama
adapted by
TIM KELLY
from the novel by
Victor Hugo



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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(LES MISÉRABLES)

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LES MISÉRABLES

A Play in Two Acts
For a flexible cast of 30 players*

CHARACTERS (in order of speaking)

VICTOR H*	narrator
THENARDIER	an evil man
MME. THENARDIER	his unpleasant wife
EPONINE	their daughter
AZELMA	a younger daughter
CHAMPMATHIEU	a simpleton accused of being Valjean
JEAN VALJEAN	ex-convict
MME. MAGLIORE	townswoman
MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL	kindly priest
MME. BAPTISTINE	his talkative sister
SERGEANT	of the police
POLICEMAN	his partner
FANTINE	young mother
MME. VICTURIEN	busybody, in charge of bead factory
FAUCHELEVENT*	townsman
GIRL #1	factory worker
GIRL #2	factory worker
GIRL #3	factory worker
MARGUERITE	flower girl
INSPECTOR JAVERT	police inspector
BAMATABOIS	unpleasant young man
JUDGE	conducts trial
PROSECUTOR	determined to convict

CHARACTERS (cont'd)

MME. RONDEAU witness against Champmathieu
MME. GRIBIER gossip
SISTER SIMPLICITY hospital nun
MARIUS in love with Cosette
MME. GILLENORMAND	... his aunt, an elderly aristocrat
ADELE student
HENRI* student
COSETTE Fantine's daughter
CHARLOTTE housekeeper

NON-SPEAKING "bits" (easily doubled): Young Man,
Young Woman, Prisoner Bibolet, Wedding Guests, Citizens.

For 16 women and 14 men. Can also be 17, 18, 19 women and
11, 12, 13 men. Much smaller with doubling. Optional extras.

*These roles can be switched to female. CONSULT FLEXIBLE
CASTING IN PRODUCTION NOTES.

TIME: 19th Century, covers period of 15 years.

PLACE: France.

STORY OF THE PLAY

"LES MISÉRABLES", one of the world's great literary classics, sold out its first edition the day it went on sale in 1862. Since then it has never been out of print, has been filmed countless times and is currently the subject of a smash hit international pop-opera.

This gripping new version has been designed for very simple production needs (basically a few tables, chairs and a bench). Under two hours. It's the story of ex-convict, Jean Valjean, and his relentless pursuit by "law and order" police Inspector Javert. Filled with fascinating vignettes of 19th Century France, the script boasts a brilliant cast of characters who weave an exciting tapestry of humankind at its best and worst.

Special emphasis has been placed on the many small roles and female characters -- the tragic Fantine and her daughter Cosette, the wretched Madame Thenardier, the lovelorn Eponine -- among others.

Visually exciting, emotionally powerful, this is imaginative theatre with a capital "T." Suitable for arena staging. Highly recommended for *all* groups -- high school, college, amateur, professional.

ABOUT THE SETTING

The basic set is the open stage. A few simple props suggest various locations. Some of these props are positioned prior to the beginning of each act; others are carried on and off by the actors. The "stage picture" should resemble a film. Play should not be presented as a series of "scenes," but as a continuous flow of action, one scene blending into the next. No waits, no pauses. Avoid fragmentation and choppiness. For the purpose of rehearsals, however, individual scenes and locales have been indicated. For additional staging suggestions, consult **PRODUCTION NOTES**.

ACT ONE

Prologue

SCENE: *Entire Company is onstage, silhouetted in dim lighting. The ACTORS are like shadows. A moment passes and VICTOR H., the author, enters DR. He stands in a shaft of light that separates him from the others. He address the audience.*

VICTOR H. My name is Victor Hugo. *(Pause.)* I am a writer. *(Indicates ACTORS.)* These actors are my creations. For you, they will act out a story of great sadness and some joy. Isn't that what life is about? Sadness and joy? *(Briskly.)* You will meet them all. Fantine, Cosette, Marius, Inspector Javert and, of course, Jean Valjean. And you will meet -- others.

THENARDIER *(calling into audience)*. Thenardier!

MME. THENARDIER. Madame Thenardier!

EPONINE. Eponine!

AZELMA. Azelma!

CHAMPMATHIEU. Champmathieu! Prisoner of the State!

VICTOR H. Ah, yes. "Prisoner of the State." That has a familiar ring.

EPONINE. Give us something to eat, Monsieur. We are hungry.

THENARDIER. Give us something to steal, Monsieur. We are thieves! *(Laughter.)*

VICTOR H *(when laughter subsides)*. Laughter not from the heart, but from the empty belly. Laughter that mocks itself. *(A step forward, a gesture to the others.)* There is a point at which the unfortunate and the infamous are associated and confounded in a single word, a *fatal* word -- "Les Misérables." *(Like a circus ringmaster, he claps his hands and the "shadows" exit L and R. To audience.)* The sickness of a nation does not kill Man. To doctor is to do a great deal; to enlighten is to do still more. Nevertheless, those of us who study the health of society must now and again shake our heads. *(Gestures to the*

open stage space.) Our canvas is one of imagination. (*Briskly.*) The month is October. A man traveling on foot has entered the town.

(JEAN VALJEAN enters forestage from DL. Shabbily dressed and dirty-looking. Over one shoulder he carries a sack. As VICTOR H. speaks, VALJEAN takes a step toward him, stops.)

VICTOR H. No one knew him. No one wanted to know him. Why should they?

VALJEAN (*muttering*). Why should they, indeed... why should anyone want to know me...?

VICTOR H. His name -- Jean Valjean. Recently freed from prison. His term -- nineteen years. His crime -- stealing a loaf of bread to feed his widowed sister and her large family.

(VICTOR H. exits R on forestage and general stage lighting dims up somewhat. At this point we can see some stage properties. Table and chairs, or stools, C. On the table are a pair of silver candlesticks. SR there is a bench. SL there is another bench, only this one is wide enough to later suggest a bed or cot.)

SCENE ONE

SCENE: Town street, forestage. Night. Still muttering to himself, VALJEAN puts his sack on the ground and kneels beside it. He "pokes" at it as one might "fluff" a pillow. He stretches out, his head on the sack. Ready for sleep.

VALJEAN. "Where am I to go?" That's what I always ask. "Somewhere else." That's what they always answer. "Somewhere else." Where do I find this land of "Somewhere Else?"

(MME. MAGLIORE, a citizen of the town, enters from DL, reacts to the sight of the tramp.)

MME. MAGLIORE. What are you doing?

VALJEAN. Eh?

MME. MAGLIORE. I said -- what are you doing? (*VALJEAN opens his eyes, sits up.*)

VALJEAN. My good woman, you can see what I'm doing. I'm sleeping here. Or *trying* to.

MME. MAGLIORE. On the ground?

VALJEAN. For nineteen years I slept on a wooden mattress. What difference does it make?

MME. MAGLIORE. Were you a soldier?

VALJEAN (*lies*). Yes. A soldier. What is the name of this town?

MME. MAGLIORE. Digne.

VALJEAN. To me, one town looks like another.

MME. MAGLIORE. Why don't you go to an inn?

VALJEAN (*lies*). I have no money.

MME. MAGLIORE. Alas, I have only four sous in my pocket.

VALJEAN (*gets to his feet*). That's better than nothing. (*MME. MAGLIORE takes the coins from some pocket. Holds them out. Greedily, VALJEAN snatches them away and into his own pocket.*)

MME. MAGLIORE. Four sous won't pay for lodging at an inn. You can't possibly spend the night here on the ground. You must be cold and hungry.

VALJEAN. I'm no stranger to cold and hunger.

MME. MAGLIORE. Surely, someone will take you in out of charity.

VALJEAN. I've knocked at every door. I've been turned away everywhere. (*MME. MAGLIORE points in the direction of the table with the candlesticks.*)

MME. MAGLIORE. Have you knocked at that house?

VALJEAN. No.

MME. MAGLIORE. Then do. (*Points L.*) Around the little path. You'll find the door. (*VALJEAN doesn't move.*) Go on. Do as I say. (*MME. MAGLIORE exits DR. VALJEAN looks after her, deciding whether or not to take her advice.*)

VALJEAN. Why not? What's one more door slammed in my face? (*He picks up his sack and tosses it over his shoulder, exits DL.*)

SCENE TWO

SCENE: *Cottage of MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL, Bishop of the town. Night. MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL enters from SR. He wears a cleric's cap. He carries a book of prayers and as he walks to the table his talkative sister, MLLE. BAPTISTINE, dogs his steps.*

MLLE. BAPTISTINE. Everyone's talking about it. I don't understand why you haven't heard. You know everything that transpires in this town. And why shouldn't you? (*MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL closes his book of prayers, sits.*)

MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL. I see my prayers will have to wait. (*Puts book on table.*) What are you talking about?

MLLE. BAPTISTINE. There's a dangerous beggar in town. He's been seen.

MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL. Is being seen a crime?

MLLE. BAPTISTINE. Probably a gypsy. He goes from house to house trying to get lodging. They say he has a terrible look on his face.

MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL (*amused*). A terrible look? My, my.

MLLE. BAPTISTINE. Something dreadful will happen tonight, everyone says so.

MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL. If everyone says so, it must be true.

MLLE. BAPTISTINE. You think I'm silly. We need bolts on the door. Any stranger can walk in.

(VALJEAN enters from SL and approaches the cottage. Stands outside as MLLE. BAPTISTINE rambles on.)

MLLE. BAPTISTINE. A town buried in the mountains like this one with not a single lantern in the streets. (*She breaks off as she sees VALJEAN standing in the "open doorway." Stifles a scream, points.*) The gypsy. (*MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL turns, stands.*)

VALJEAN. I mean no harm to anyone.

MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL. You are welcome in my house.

MLLE. BAPTISTINE (*sotto*). Madness. (*VALJEAN speaks directly.*)

VALJEAN. Look. My name is Jean Valjean. I'm a convict on parole.

MLLE. BAPTISTINE. Auugh. There, Brother, what did I tell you!?

MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL. Be quiet, Baptistine. (*She pouts.*)
Go on.

VALJEAN. They let me out four days ago and I've barely eaten since. I am walking to Pontarlier.

MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL. That is a great distance. (*To MLLE. BAPTISTINE.*) Bring some food for our guest.

MLLE. BAPTISTINE. Guest?! (*MLLE. BAPTISTINE tosses up her hands in despair, exits R. MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL motions to VALJEAN.*)

MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL. Come in, come in, my son. (*Warily, like a hunted animal, VALJEAN moves closer to the table. His eyes darting about.*)

VALJEAN. When I came to this town I went to an inn. They turned me out. I had to show them my prison papers. It's the law.

MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL. I know.

VALJEAN. If I don't show my papers they can send me back.

MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL. No papers are required here.
(*Glad for the opportunity to talk openly with someone who appears sympathetic, VALJEAN pours out his woe.*)

VALJEAN. I tried another inn and the woman told me to clear out. I tried the jail and the doorkeeper wouldn't open. I crawled into a dog kennel and the dog drove me out just as if he were a man and knew who I was. I can't wash away the stink of prison. I thought I'd sleep in a field under the stars, but there weren't any stars and it looked as though it was going to rain. I lay down in the street and a good woman pointed to this cottage and said I should try here.

MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL. She did right.

(*MLLE. BAPTISTINE returns, still nervous about the visitor. In one hand she has a bowl with a spoon sticking out. In the*

other hand, she carries a small loaf of bread or a roll. With an air of defiance, she puts the meal on the table and starts to exit.)

MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL. Baptistine.

Mlle. BAPTISTINE (*sharp*). What is it? (*She turns.*)

MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL. You've forgotten the wine.

Mlle. BAPTISTINE. His sort is used to water.

MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL (*gently*). A glass of wine for our guest. (*Reluctantly, she nods, exits.*) Forgive my sister. Kindness, I fear, is not one of her virtues. (*Gestures that VALJEAN should sit.*) Please. (*VALJEAN drops his sack, sits at the table and attacks his food. His eyes continue to dart about -- as if he feared some enemy might materialize and snatch away his bread and soup.*)

VALJEAN. I didn't tell the good woman I was an ex-convict. She thought I was a soldier. She gave me four sous. But I have money. The money I earned by nineteen years' work in prison.

(Mlle. BAPTISTINE enters with a glass of wine.)

MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL. Here's your wine. (*He takes the glass from Mlle. BAPTISTINE.*) Thank you, Baptistine. (*Mlle. BAPTISTINE gives them both a look of disapproval, exits. MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL puts the wine in front of VALJEAN. He grabs the glass and drains it in thirsty gulps, slams the glass back to the table.*)

VALJEAN (*gobbling the bread, slurping the soup*). What is this place? Is it an inn? I'm ready to pay. I don't care how much. I'm very tired. Will you let me stay? I've walked I don't know how many leagues.

MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL. You are welcome to stay, Monsieur Valjean.

VALJEAN. *Monsieur?* You call *me* monsieur? (*Annoyed.*) Weren't you listening? I'm a convict. (*Reaches inside his clothing and pulls out some yellow papers.*) This is my parole. Read it: "Five years for robbery with violence. Fourteen years for four attempts to escape -- a very dangerous man." Look, I'll

show you. (*Rolls up his sleeve, indicates a spot on his arm.*)

That tattoo marks me. Convict, convict. *Convict.*

MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL. I've seen such markings before.

VALJEAN. So there you are. Will you turn me out? Or, will you give me a bed for the night? Do you have a stable or a barn?

MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL. There is a room with a bed. It is yours.

VALJEAN. You mean it? You won't throw me out? (*MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL smiles, shakes his head.*) You're a good man. (*Yawns.*) You're an innkeeper, aren't you?

MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL. I am a priest and this is where I live.

VALJEAN. A priest! But of course. I'm stupid. I didn't notice your cleric's cap. You're human, Monsieur le Cure. You don't despise people. (*He yawns again.*) Forgive me. I can't keep my eyes open. (*MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL takes a match which is by one of the candles, strikes it.*)

MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL. Then you must sleep. (*Lights a candle.*) You've suffered a great deal.

VALJEAN. But I've learned things. There are classes in prison for anyone who wants to learn. (*Laughs self-mockingly.*) That's where I learned to read and write. I'm a clever fellow underneath this dirt.

MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL. This candle will light your way. You'll find the room. (*Indicates the bench - cot - SL.*) There. (*VALJEAN takes the candle, stands.*)

VALJEAN. The candlestick is heavy.

MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL. It's silver.

VALJEAN. Silver? *Real* silver? I'm not used to such luxury.

MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL. Sleep well, Jean Valjean. Before you leave tomorrow you must have a bowl of warm milk from our cows.

VALJEAN. *Fresh* warm milk? It's been a long time. Thank you, Father. (*Candlestick in hand, VALJEAN picks up his sack, crosses to his "room." He sits on the edge of the cot. Blows out the candle flame, sets the sack and candlestick on the floor. Exhausted, he falls back on the cot, sleeps.*)

(While this bit of pantomime plays, MLLE. BAPTISTINE returns. Picks up bowl and wine glass.)

MLLE. BAPTISTINE. He didn't finish the soup.

MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL. Sleep is what he needs.

MLLE. BAPTISTINE. You are my brother and you are a bishop, but sometimes my brother and the bishop are both fools.

MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL. Even fools have their place.

MLLE. BAPTISTINE. Have you thought what you're doing?

How do you know he's never murdered anyone?

MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL. That is God's affair.

MLLE. BAPTISTINE *(as she exits)*. I'll say nothing further. *(Touch of sarcasm.)* After all, what do I understand of the world? I am only one woman in a small town. Whatever my brother does is right. Whatever the bishop says is true. *(She's out.)*

MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL *(calls after her)*. I am pleased you had nothing further to say, Baptistine. *(Looks to VALJEAN's room.)* Nineteen long years. *(He follows after MLLE. BAPTISTINE and the lights dim down to indicate a passage of time. Moments pass. Slowly, VALJEAN sits up. He listens. He gets out of bed, listens again. Satisfied it's "all clear," he drops to his knees and seizes the candlestick. His criminal instincts are in full bloom.)*

VALJEAN. Silver. Solid silver. I can feel the weight. *(Gleeful.)* And the worth. *(Without a second's hesitation, he thrusts the candlestick into the sack, stands and creeps off, SL. More moments pass to indicate the approach of morning.)*

(MLLE. BAPTISTINE enters from R, straightening her dress. She's just come from her room and is yawning. Suddenly, she remembers VALJEAN.)

MLLE. BAPTISTINE. It's after sunup. Time that gypsy was on his way. *(With a purposeful stride she walks to the "bedroom," stand outside, calls.)* Monsieur? Monsieur, the sun is up. Time for you to go. *(Listens.)* Monsieur, answer me. *(Enters room. At once she realizes the ex-convict has fled.)* Gone!

(Searches.) And the candlestick with him. Thief! (She runs back to the table and checks to see if the other candlestick is still there. She yells off-stage R.) See what your charity has done. Oh, you foolish man! So gullible!

(MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL enters, R.)

MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL. Calm yourself, Baptistine.

Mlle. BAPTISTINE. Calm myself, calm myself. Is that all you can say? It's a miracle he didn't cut our throats. He's gone!

MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL. So, then, he's gone. There's no need to carry on in this manner. He probably wanted an early start.

Mlle. BAPTISTINE. He's stolen from you! (Points to remaining candlestick.) There's only one left. He's stolen the silver candlestick you lighted for him. Who knows what else?

(Three MEN enter from SL. Two are POLICEMEN, a sergeant and a lower rank. Between them, head bowed, is VALJEAN. The POLICEMAN holds the sack. They stand in the open "doorway.")

SERGEANT. Monseigneur.

Mlle. BAPTISTINE. They've got him. What good luck. (SERGEANT shoves VALJEAN into the cottage.)

MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL. So here you are, Jean! I'm delighted to see you again. You forgot the other candlestick. What good is only one candlestick when it belongs to a pair?

Mlle. BAPTISTINE. What are you saying?

SERGEANT (surprised). Monseigneur, when we saw him he seemed to be on the run. We wanted to make sure. (Reaches into sack and takes out the other candlestick.) We found this in his knapsack.

Mlle. BAPTISTINE. I knew it.

MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL. And he told you the priest had given it to him. I can see how it was. You felt bound to bring him here. But you are mistaken.

SERGEANT. You mean we can let him go?

MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL. Certainly.

- VALJEAN (*slowly lifts his head*). Am I really allowed to go?
- SERGEANT. You heard. (*With a nod, SERGEANT indicates POLICEMAN should return the sack to VALJEAN. He does, along with the candlestick, which he drops inside.*)
- MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL. Thank you, gentlemen.
- SERGEANT (*salutes*). Monseigneur. (*He nods to Mlle. BAPTISTINE, exits L. POLICEMAN follows. VALJEAN looks hopeless and helpless. He's trembling.*)
- Mlle. BAPTISTINE. Mad. That's what you are -- mad. (*On the verge of tears, she runs off, R.*)
- VALJEAN. You could have sent me back to prison. Back to the stink and the pain. (*Mystified by MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL's action.*) Why -- ?
- MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL. Sell the candlesticks. Use the money to make yourself an honest man.
- VALJEAN. I had forgotten what it was like to feel shame. (*Impulsively, he drops to one knee and clutches MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL's hand.*) Forgive me.
- MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL (*helps him up*). It is time for you to forgive yourself. And the world if you can. Promise you will do as I asked?
- VALJEAN (*deeply felt*). Yes.
- MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL. Always remember, you no longer belong to what is evil but to what is good. (*He hands him the table candlestick.*) Now, Jean, go in peace. The door here is never locked. (*VALJEAN stares at MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL a moment. Words are useless. Clutching the table candlestick and the sack, he leaves the cottage and exits up SL. The lighting shifts and MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL slowly walks off-stage in the same direction VALJEAN has taken. MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL is lost in his thoughts.*)

SCENE THREE

SCENE: *Outside the Thenardier Inn. Day. The exterior of the inn is represented by the bench placed SR. As MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL moves to exit, the POLICEMEN return - or*

STAGEHANDS wearing blue smocks to suggest workmen of the period - and move the table upstage and position it at an angle. Table now becomes a "multi-purpose" prop. When this is done they exit. As MONSEIGNEUR MYRIEL exits and the POLICEMEN reposition the table, MME. THENARDIER enters R carrying a bowl of potatoes and a knife. She sits, placing the bowl on the ground. She begins to peel.

THENARDIER's VOICE (*from off-stage*). Louise!

MME. THENARDIER. I'm here.

THENARDIER's VOICE. I must see you.

MME. THENARDIER. Come outside.

(She continues her work. Her husband, THENARDIER, a gruff, evil individual enters behind her. He holds some papers.)

THENARDIER (*slaps at the papers*). How am I to pay these new bills?

MME. THENARDIER (*calmly*). Is it my fault you put too much water in the wine and customers stay away?

THENARDIER. That's no way for a wife to speak.

MME. THENARDIER. Wife? I'm more of a workhorse. (*He makes as if to strike her.*)

THENARDIER. Mind your mouth, or I'll shut it.

MME. THENARDIER. You're good at that.

THENARDIER (*the papers*). I won't pay! They're trying to cheat me.

(From DL on the forestage enters FANTINE. She's a pretty, young girl. Vulnerable. She carries an infant - doll - wrapped in a blanket. Holds a traveling or carpetbag. She makes her way toward the inn.)

MME. THENARDIER. If you don't pay they won't make deliveries. If they won't make deliveries, we might as well close up.

THENARDIER. They pad these bills. Besides, I don't water the wine. I spit in it. (*He laughs, exits. MME. THENARDIER notices FANTINE.*)