Les Miserables

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF VICTOR HUGO

Victor Hugo was the son of a French major and general in Napoleon's army, so he traveled around often as a child. His mother was a royalist (committed to the French monarchy), and Hugo initially adopted her views. He studied law in Paris, but from 1816 on he began to write poetry and drama, and his first book of poetry won accolades from Louis XVIII. Slowly Hugo was drawn into a crowd of literary people who were devoted to Romanticism, and over time he exchanged his royalist views for more liberal opinions, especially after Charles X imposed restrictions on freedom of the press. His first work of mainstream success was *Notre-Dame de Paris*, (known in English as *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*) a historical novel that provides a harsh condemnation of social ills. During the Revolution of 1848, Hugo was elected to the Constituent Assembly, but after Napoleon III took power in the Second Empire of 1851, he was forced to flee to Brussels. He eventually settled on the island of Guernsey, where he wrote *Les Misérables*—a book that almost immediately attained worldwide success. Hugo married his childhood friend, Adèle Foucher, and had five children. He died in 1885 and was given a state funeral, having become a national hero once a republic was again established in France in 1870. Today, while he is best known abroad for his novels like *Notre-Dame* and *Les Misérables* (as well as the musical that the latter prompted), the French tend to think of Hugo as one of their great national poets.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Contrary to common belief, *Les Misérables* does not take place during the French Revolution, but rather in the years between 1815 and 1832, culminating in a relatively minor insurrection that year. However, knowledge of earlier French history is definitely helpful in understanding much of the plot. 1789 saw the famous capture of the Bastille fortress by French revolutionaries, but only in 1792 was France declared a republic, after a violent uprising leading to the imprisonment of the king and his wife, Marie-Antoinette. The National Convention—the ruling body— executed the king after trying him for treason against the nation. In the coming years the new rulers began to turn against each other and a period of great violence known as "the Terror" ensued. In 1799 Napoleon Bonaparte staged a coup and, in 1804, was elected Emperor. He embarked on multiple military campaigns with the ultimate goal of conquering all of Europe. Only in 1815 did his enemies, now in alliance, invade France and send him into exile—but he returned for a "Hundred Days" of renewed battle in 1815 before being definitively defeated at the Battle of Waterloo. Thereafter, France reverted to a monarchy, in what's known as the Restoration. In 1830, several days of riots in Paris, which is referred to as the "July Revolution," led to the replacement of the king, Charles X, with his distant relative from another line of the family, Louis-Philippe. Two years later, people in Paris were disgruntled with how little this minor change had impacted anything. The direct trigger for the 1832 riots, which were quickly quashed (as the book portrays), was the death of a well-liked and socially liberal politician, Lamarque.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

As a young man and budding literary figure, Victor Hugo worked on translations of Virgil, a ancient Roman poet best known for the *Aeneid*, an epic poem that deals with the founding of the Roman people after their defeat by the Greeks in the Trojan War. The journey of the protagonist, Aeneas, from defeat to triumph—overcoming obstacles such as a trip down into the underworld—has various points of resonance with Jean Valjean's own path. But Hugo was also working within a more confined literary period, one of French Romanticism. This movement was characterized by an emphasis on individual subjectivity, an idealization of nature, and freedom of the artist. Romantic poets like Chateaubriand had an enormous influence on Hugo, especially as a younger man, when he held more conservative political opinions. Later, Hugo would attempt to use Romantic methods for a different social and political goal, seeking to expose the small tragedies of the common man. In this, his work can be related to other 19th-century novels that sought to portray social ills, including Charles Dickens' *Tale of Two Cities*. Hugo's work prefigured Balzac and Tolstoy's sweeping novels of realism in its attempt to create a total portrayal of society.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Les Misérables
- **When Written:** 1845-1862
- **Where Written:** Paris and in exile, in Brussels and the island of Guernsey
- **When Published:** 1862
- **Literary Period:** French Romanticism
- **Genre:** Epic Novel, Historical Fiction
- **Setting:** Paris and other provincial towns in France
- **Climax:** Jean Valjean leads a wounded Marius on his back through the sewers of Paris
- **Antagonist:** Police inspector Javert is constantly on the trail of Valjean; he is, however, a more complex antagonist than

the purely evil Thenardier.

- **Point of View:** The novel is in third-person, cleaving closely to the minds of several characters, but at times withdrawing as the narrator professes ignorance for certain actions or thoughts. The narrator inserts himself explicitly into the novel at several points, and often makes his own social and analytic commentary on the events he's describing.

EXTRA CREDIT

Mass Mobilization. For Victor Hugo's funeral, nearly two million people were drawn to the streets of Paris—more than the city's entire population at that time.

Let's Talk Politics. Hugo originally envisioned *Les Misérables* as a love story and indictment of the prison system in France. Only after he witnessed the 1848 revolution did he begin to focus more on revolution as a theme and emphasis.

PLOT SUMMARY

Les Misérables opens not with the protagonist, Jean Valjean, but in an anonymous French town of D—, where a Bishop known as "Welcome" or "Bienvenu" is astonishing the inhabitants with his modest ways, his commitment to the poor, and his unyielding acts of forgiveness. The Bishop is not necessarily a brilliant theologian but rather shows his character through his good works. One day, a shady, ominous-looking figure arrives in town, looking for a meal and a bed. Word gets around that this man is Jean Valjean, a convict recently released from the galleys—his yellow passport, a requirement for ex-convicts, betrays him—and everyone refuses to host him. Finally, a woman in the street tells the despairing Valjean to knock at the Bishop's door. He does so, and the Bishop treats him kindly and cordially. That night, however, Valjean wakes up and, after a brief battle with his conscience, tucks the Bishop's silverware and ornate **candlesticks** under his arm and runs away. The next day, he's brought back by the police, but the Bishop claims that he had given Valjean these things as a gift, so he should be set free. Valjean is absolutely overwhelmed by this act. He heads away from town, struggling to understand how and why the Bishop didn't obey the laws of judgment and revenge that seem, to Valjean, to define society. As he's struggling with the new idea of mercy, Valjean comes across a small Savoyard boy named Gervais, and steals the young boy's money from him. Suddenly, he's stricken by what he's just done—a reflexive act based in his own past—and he races around the area, attempting without success to find Gervais.

The novel's focus moves to Paris, where a young, poor, and innocent woman named Fantine has arrived from the provinces to gain a living for herself. She's fallen in with a group of youths, paired off between men and women, and led by Felix Tholomyes, a jovial young provincial man who's in Paris to study but mainly to have a good time. Fantine, however, is sincere in her love for him, and unable to see through his act. At the end of their summer together, Tholomyes and his friends leave a note for the girls saying that they've been summoned back home and must return to reality. But Fantine is pregnant. After she gives birth to her child, Cosette, she knows that she must take desperate measures in order to care for her without revealing the socially stigmatizing fact of Cosette's illegitimacy. Stopping at Montfermeil on the way to the factory town of M.-sur-M., she sees a woman, Madame Thenardier, watching her two children, Eponine and Azelma, play outside. Touched by this sight, she asks the woman to take care of her daughter while she works. Fantine promises that she'll return in six months. Madame's husband, Thenardier, haggles a higher monthly price for taking care of her, and Fantine sets off again. She arrives at M.-sur-M. and is given a job at a factory. However, people slowly grow suspicious of her lack of a family and her constant letter-writing to Montfermeil. Finally, one woman goes to Montfermeil herself and returns with the news of Fantine's bastard child. The supervisor fires Fantine, and she is forced to take all kinds of menial jobs. Meanwhile, Thenardier continues demanding higher and higher sums for Cosette, lying about various sicknesses she's had—while in reality the family has been using Cosette as their personal servant—until Fantine is ultimately required to prostitute herself.

One day Fantine is detained, after a dandy on the street torments her until she throws herself on him. The police inspector Javert brings her to the mayor, Madeleine, who was the one responsible for transforming M.-sur-M. from a poor village into a thriving factory town through new industrial methods he invented. The mayor is known for his generosity and kindness, his constant good works, his faith—and his commitment to the Bishop of D---, whose death he mourns profoundly. After hearing Fantine's tale, to Javert's shock, Madeleine tells him to let this woman go. Javert, who believes only in the authority of the law, leaves, fuming. He's been suspicious of Madeleine ever since he saw him achieve a herculean feat, lifting a horse-cart off of a man named Fauchelevent and saving his life. The only man that strong whom Javert ever knew was a convict, Jean Valjean, who is now wanted for another theft against a Savoyard boy. Javert then finds out that Jean Valjean, now going by the name of Champmathieu, has been captured in the town of Arras. Javert tells Madeleine this story, and Madeleine grows pale, for Madeleine is none other than Valjean himself. Madeleine spends a sleepless night wondering if he should abandon the town—and, now, Fantine, who is desperately ill and has asked him to fetch her daughter Cosette—or sacrifice an innocent man. The next day, he decides to go to the trial anyway, still unsure of what he'll say. But once there, he confesses in front of the entire courtroom that he is Jean Valjean, and offers various proofs. In the confusion that ensues, Valjean isn't arrested, and he manages to slip back to his bank, where he withdraws a sum

of half a million francs. He hides this in the forest of Montfermeil and then returns to M.-sur-M., where Fantine is at the point of death. Only then does Javert arrest Valjean and send him back to prison.

Not long after that, at a port in Toulon where convicts are responsible for cleaning the ships in harbor, one convict loses his balance and nearly falls into the sea, barely able to hold on to the side of the ship. Suddenly, with a crowd watching, another convict races over, climbs down to the other man, and carries him back up to safety. Shortly thereafter, this savior himself totters and then falls into the sea: the convict, Jean Valjean, is declared to be dead. This, however, is not true, and Valjean is able to swim underwater to safety. He travels to Montfermeil, where he comes across a small waif in the forest at night, carrying a massive bucket of water back to the Thenardiers. It's Cosette, who leads him back home, where Valjean sees just how the family has been mistreating her. Valjean looks poor himself, so Thenardier doesn't respect him, until Valjean buys Cosette an extravagant doll, transforming the way the Thenardiers look at him. Valjean pays Thenardier off and takes Cosette away with him to Paris. There, they spend several months in quiet happiness, as Valjean teaches Cosette to read and write and nurses her back from her state of wretchedness and near-starvation. Valjean becomes known as the poor man who gives alms, but one evening he gives money to a beggar and thinks he recognizes Javert in disguise. After growing suspicious that Javert is on his trail, Valjean takes Cosette and abandons their home. That night, he grows aware that Javert is following him through the streets of Paris, eventually leading a whole group of policemen behind him across the Seine and into the streets of the Right Bank. Finally, Valjean reaches an alley with no outlet, only a massive wall. With only a few minutes to spare before Valjean and his men corner them, Valjean uses his massive strength and a spare rope to hoist Cosette and himself up the wall, succeeding in losing Javert. They fall to the other side and encounter none other than Fauchelevent, whose life Valjean had saved, and who now works as gardener in the Petit-Picpus convent. Fauchelevent helps Valjean and Cosette sneak out of the convent and then reintroduces them to the prioress as his brother and niece. Cosette enrolls in the school, and they spend several happy years there until Fauchelevent's death, at which point Cosette and Valjean move away to their own home.

Cosette and Valjean are accustomed to walking in the Luxembourg Gardens, where they often encounter a young man named Marius. Marius had grown up with his grandfather, Gillenormand, a somewhat ridiculous but cheery old man with royalist views. Marius' father, Georges Pontmercy, had been a colonel in Napoleon's army, which Gillenormand disapproved of, so after his mother's death Gillenormand had raised Marius himself and forbidden his father from seeing him. Only after his father's death does Marius learn how much his father loved him, and as he learns more about him, his political views begin to change radically. Finally, once his grandfather finds out just how loyal he's become to his father and how liberal his politics have become, he turns Marius out. Marius gets involved with a group of leftist students, the Friends of the ABC in the Latin Quarter, including Courfeyrac and Enjolras. He continues his law studies but falls into abject poverty, moving into a house known as the Gorbeau hovel. Slowly, he becomes infatuated with the unknown girl who walks in the Luxembourg each day with her father.

Marius's neighbors at the Gorbeau hovel are the Jondrettes, a wretchedly poor family. The husband Jondrette, rather than working, prefers to send plaintive letters to wealthy benefactors in order to ask for money. One day, Marius peers through a hole in the wall and is able to see the girl from the Luxembourg, with her father, together who have come to give alms to the Jondrettes. The Jondrette husband puts on an over-the-top act of desperation, and the girl's father promises to return that evening with money for them. After they depart, Jondrette exclaims that he recognized that man, and he'll take his revenge on him for good this evening. Terrified that the girl will come to harm, Marius goes to see a policeman—Javert—and tells him of the man's plans. Javert prepares a sting for that evening. Marius witnesses the entire affair: Jondrette hires other criminals, traps the man in his room, and exclaims that he's Thenardier, and he knows the man is the one who stole the girl (Cosette, though he doesn't say her name) away from him. But the man is able to escape, and Javert captures Thenardier and his cronies.

Marius is still confused at the identity of the man and his daughter. He moves away from the hovel. But the Thenardier daughter, Eponine, has fallen in love with Marius. She knows he wants to see the girl, and so although it pains her, she finds him and shows him to the garden where Cosette often sits throughout the afternoons. Cosette recognizes Marius from the Luxembourg, and they begin to spend every afternoon together all throughout the spring, without Valjean finding out.

However, Eponine's jealousy is such that she cannot bear for Marius to be happy with Cosette. She sends Valjean an anonymous note warning that he is not safe in the house. Valjean has begun to feel in any case that it would be safer for him and Cosette to go abroad, and he tells her that they are moving to London. In despair, Cosette writes a letter to Marius, who goes to see Gillenormand in hopes that his grandfather will, despite his anger at Marius, give him permission to marry. Gillenormand is thrilled to see Marius, but cannot find a way to show his emotions, and Marius ends up leaving, having failed to achieve that permission.

Meanwhile, it's early June in 1832, and many people in Paris are distraught at the death of General Lamarque, an extremely popular politician whom the lower classes of Paris adored for his attention to social issues. Tensions are rising in the streets

of Paris, and Courfeyrac and Enjolras, among others, are preparing to fight against the army, hoping to spark another revolution that will lead to social change. Marius is wandering around Paris in despair. He hasn't heard back from Cosette, and decides he'll die rather than live without her, so he might as well join the insurgents. They begin to create a barricade around the Corinthe tavern. What follows is a long battle scene, which lasts nearly the entire night. Meanwhile, Valjean finds a draft of a love letter written from Cosette to Marius. He's utterly distraught, thinking that now he'll lose her to another man. Then he intercepts a letter from Marius to Cosette, which was meant to be delivered the next morning, saying that he's died on the barricades. Against his own will, Valjean goes to the barricades himself. There, Javert has been taken prisoner. Valjean asks permission to kill Javert himself, but instead of shooting him, he lets Javert go free. As the army descends on the tavern, killing all the insurgents who remain, Valjean finds Marius, deeply wounded, behind the barricade, and carries him away. There's nowhere for them to escape, however, until Valjean catches sight of an iron grating. He lifts it off and they find themselves in the Paris sewer. Valjean carries Marius for hours through the sewers, growing increasingly exhausted and despairing that he'll ever find a way out. Finally he emerges, only to come face-to-face with Javert, who had been pursuing Thenardier into the sewers. Valjean tells Javert he will surrender to arrest, but first asks permission to deposit Marius at Gillenormand's, and to say goodbye to Cosette. As he ascends the stairs to Cosette's room, he looks out the window and sees that Javert has disappeared. Struggling with Valjean's mercy, and now his own, Javert is in total despair. He cannot find a way to reconcile his belief in authority and the law with this new system of mercy. He throws himself into the Seine, killing himself.

Gillenormand nurses Marius back to health, and loses all of his former pride. He and Valjean agree that Marius and Cosette may marry, and the couple passes several happy months together. Valjean eventually tells Marius about his past as a convict, and Marius in response slowly weans Valjean away from Cosette, until he can barely see her at all. However, as Valjean is nearing death, Marius finds out through various sources that Valjean had reformed and enacted many good works as the mayor of Madeleine; that he hadn't killed Javert but had let him go free; and that it was Valjean who carried Marius through the sewers to safety and freedom. Marius and Cosette rush to Valjean's bedside, where he dies, happy, next to Cosette.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Jean Valjean – A convict from a poor provincial family, whose long and torturous transformation amounts to the most significant narrative arc of the novel. The 19 years spent by Valjean in the galleys transform him from a desperate boy into a hardened criminal—revealing, according to Hugo, the social evil of the prison system. Valjean is then transformed by his encounter with the Bishop of D---. After he steals from a small boy once more after that encounter, we never see him commit an evil act again. However, at several points throughout the novel we witness Valjean in severe internal struggle with his own conscience. He is constantly attempting to redeem himself for his past life, and one of the novel's major questions is whether this is possible, especially because his past life never truly leaves him. He goes by several other names other than his own across the novel: M. Madeleine, Ultime Fauchelevent, and M. Leblanc.

Charles-François-Bienvenu Myriel – Regularly referred to as Bishop of D--, Bienvenu, the novel begins as a story about the Bishop, who is the embodiment of goodness in the book—even as the narrator suggests that ultimate goodness is not the same as great intelligence or even theological knowledge. By creating a religious and specifically Christian figure as the epitome of goodness, Hugo both emphasizes his belief that God is the way to goodness, and offers an alternative to the conception of many religious figures as corrupt and power-hungry. The Bishop is the key to Valjean's redemption—not necessarily in his own person but, according to the novel, as a conduit to God's redemption.

Cosette – Left by her mother at the Thenardier household, Cosette has a bitter, wretched childhood, one that is transformed when Jean Valjean takes her away. Cosette is portrayed as an innocent, deeply good person, whose main characteristics are her love for Valjean and then for Marius. As a character, she also symbolizes one major aspect of social evil: the abandonment and misery of children.

Fantine – Cosette's mother, a young, sweet girl from the provinces who is naïve and innocent. She falls into a love affair with Tholomyes and is ultimately betrayed by him and left with a child. This one event ends up causing her downfall, as she is fired from a factory when people find out about her bastard child, and she is forced to be a prostitute in order to support herself and her daughter. The narrator portrays Fantine as emblematic of social wretchedness, especially as it relates to women, and especially when it results from lack of compassion in society.

Thenardier (Jondrette) – An inn-keeper at Montfermeil who takes Cosette in and then attempts to swindle Fantine by demanding larger and larger sums of money for Cosette's care. Thenardier is greedy, selfish, uncaring, and generally evil. He changes little if at all over the course of the novel, as his only goal remains attaining a fortune by any means possible (except by hard work). Thenardier is more of a stock villain than Javert, who is a more complex antagonist.

Eponine – Thenardier's eldest daughter, a spoiled, self-satisfied

little girl at the inn in Montfermeil, but later a desperate waif who obeys her criminal father even though it appears that in other circumstances she could have been a morally upstanding person. Eponine will do anything for Marius, whom she's in love with, but this love is compromised by Eponine's jealousy.

Javert – A police inspector who originally met Jean Valjean in the galleys, and who reemerges again and again throughout the novel, constantly threatening to expose Valjean's identity and cause his downfall. Javert believes in authority and obedience to the law above all else. The law is so sacred for him that he cannot envision any other system of morality or justice. Javert's wholehearted devotion to the law is portrayed in the novel as ultimately insufficient, even if it is well-intentioned.

M. Gillenormand – A jovial, somewhat ridiculous old man who lives on the Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire. Politically reactionary, a ladies' man, and prone to outbreaks of temper, Gillenormand is portrayed as a rather absurd character, prone to making rambling speeches of uncertain meaning. But his love for Marius, even though he often proves unable to show it well, redeems him in the eyes of the narrator.

Marius – The grandson of Gillenormand, who is brought up in his household. Marius is perhaps the character that changes the most throughout the novel, shifting from a youth who parrots his grandfather's reactionary views to a revolutionary himself. According to the narrator, poverty actually strengthens Marius's character, making him devoid of greed or pride. His relationship with Cosette is the main love story of the novel, though it has tragic dimensions in terms of how it prevents Marius from being as forgiving as he might have been to Valjean once he learns of the latter's past.

Magnon – One of Gillenormand's servant-maids, who bears two of his children. Magnon gives her monthly payments to support them. When these two children die, she takes on two of the Thenardier boys to replace them in order to continue to receive the money without Magnon knowing any better. She shares the money with the Thenardiers.

Georges Pontmercy – A timid, shy man who nevertheless becomes a successful colonel under Napoleon. He believes he was "saved" by Thenardier at Waterloo, though in fact Thenardier merely was trying to rob the corpses on the battlefield. He marries Gillenormand's daughter and they have a son, Marius, but Gillenormand doesn't approve of the colonel's politics and so prevents him from seeing his son. Only after his death does the colonel become Marius's hero.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Madame Thenardier – Thenardier's wife is similarly ill-intentioned, although she does seem to harbor some uncertainty about all her husband's criminal activity. She still obeys him in every way, however.

Azelma – Thenardier's younger daughter.

Father Fauchelevent – A businessman in M.-sur-M., whom Valjean saves after he falls beneath the weight of his horse-cart. Fauchelevent then repays the favor by taking Valjean and Cosette into the convent, where he later works, and by giving Valjean his own name.

Mademoiselle Gillenormand – Gillenormand's daughter, a middle-aged woman who never married and who lives with him. She is pious but also scheming, attempting to get her nephew Theodule to replace Marius as the family's heir. She is mainly characterized as a melancholy woman whose life has largely passed her by.

Basque – Gillenormand's male servant at the Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire.

Gavroche – Son of the Thenardiers, who becomes a street urchin who wanders around Paris, eats what he can find, and sleeps where he can. Gavroche is a trouble-maker but ultimately kindhearted. For Hugo, he epitomizes the essential goodness of men as it can be seen even within social desperation.

Navret – A friend of Gavroche.

Cravatte – A bandit who gives the Bishop of D--- an opportunity to reveal his lack of fear for robbers and murderers, and instead caution against internal sin.

Mademoiselle Baptistine – The Bishop of D---'s sister, a respectable-looking spinster who is nothing but good, and obeys her brother's sometimes odd-seeming wishes.

Madame Magloire – The servant of the Bishop of D---, who is less thrilled about the Bishop's desires to go without all but the barest necessities, though she too admires him.

G--- – A former member of the Convention with whom the Bishop has a troubling political conversation before G--- dies.

Gervais – A small Savoyard boy from whom Valjean steals money—the last crime he commits.

Felix Tholomyes – A cheerful, witty, and handsome young man from the provinces, whose time in Paris is merely an adventure. Though he impregnates Fantine, he never again thinks of her and later becomes a wealthy provincial lawyer, thereby symbolizing the distinct expectations and trajectories for men and women.

Listolier – A friend of Tholomyes.

Fameuil – A friend of Tholomyes.

Blancheville – A friend of Tholomyes.

Dahlia – A girl who spends a summer with Tholomyes and his gang, along with Fantine.

Zephine – A friend of Dahlia.

Favourite – A friend of Dahlia.

Madame Victurnien – A town gossip at M.-sur-M. who travels to Montfermeil and whose information about Cosette leads to

Fantine's dismissal.

M. Bamatabois – A dandy who makes fun of Fantine when she's working as a prostitute.

Sister Simplice – A nun who looks after Mayor Madeleine. She is known for having never told a lie.

Champmathieu – Accused of stealing apples from an orchard, Champmathieu is also identified falsely as Jean Valjean.

Chenildieu – A convict who had been with Valjean in the galleys, and falsely identifies Champmathieu.

Cochepaille – Another convict who had been with Valjean in the galleys, and falsely identifies Champmathieu.

Boulatruelle – An ex-convict who tries several times, unsuccessfully, to find out where Valjean hid his treasure in the Montfermeil forest.

Madame Albertine – A resident of the Petit-Picpus convent, whose past love affairs serve as a source of intrigue for the girls in the boarding school there.

Mademoiselle de Blemeur (Mother Innocente) – The prioress of the Petit-Picpus convent, known for being jovial and kindhearted.

Gribier – A grave-digger.

Madame Bourgon – Housekeeper at the Gorbeau hovel.

Theodule – Marius's distant cousin, a handsome but haughty lieutenant.

Enjolras – A young student who's a member of the Friends of the ABC society. He is from a wealthy family, a handsome young man more concerned with political liberty than love affairs.

Combeferre – Enjolras's friend and another member of the Friends of the ABC; intellectual and clever.

Prouvaire – Another member of the Friends of the ABC; a romantic.

Feuilly – Another member of the Friends of the ABC; a self-educated worker.

Bahorel – Another member of the Friends of the ABC; somewhat lazy and capricious.

Courfeyrac – Another member of the Friends of the ABC; witty and jovial, but politically committed.

Laigle de Meaux (Bossuet) – Another member of the Friends of the ABC; intelligent but always getting himself into scrapes.

Joly – A friend of Bossuet and Grantaire.

Grantaire – Another member of the Friends of the ABC; the only skeptic in the group, though he adores Enjolras.

M. Mabeuf – An old man whose sole love is botanical research, and who was responsible for Marius's renewed love of his father. He slowly falls into misery before being swept up in the riots of 1832.

Mother Plutarque – Mabeuf's apartment-mate.

Claquesous, or Le Cabuc – A Parisian criminal who only emerges at night. He is part of the crowd at the barricade, shoots an innocent man, and thereafter is shot by Enjolras.

Montparnasse – A Parisian criminal, and a kind of dandy.

Babet – A Parisian criminal, thin and thoughtless.

Gueulemer – A Parisian criminal, massive and idle.

Brujon – Another Parisian criminal.

Panchaud (Printanier, Bigrenaille) – A famous Parisian criminal.

Toussaint – The servant-maid of Valjean and Cosette in Paris.

The widow Hucheloup – Proprietress of the Corinthe tavern, the last defense of the insurgents.

Mateloup – Servant-girl at the Corinthe tavern.

Captain Fannicot – A government supporter and army commander killed at the barricade.

Brevet – A convict who falsely identifies Champmathieu as Jean Valjean, eventually causing Valjean to reveal his identity.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

LOVE AND REDEMPTION

In *Les Misérables*, Jean Valjean is transformed from a hardened criminal into a paragon of virtue. He ultimately sacrifices himself so that his adopted daughter Cosette might attain happiness with Marius, even as it devastates Valjean to "lose" her to the man she loves. In many ways, Jean Valjean is redeemed by his acts, which constitute penance for the wrongs he committed earlier in life. While generated and accelerated by love, redemption—according to the novel—does not take place on a straightforward path. Instead, it is understood as a process to be constantly fought for.

Redemption seems to take place on two major axes in the novel (which also correspond to Christian theology): selfless love and good works. Jean Valjean fulfills the second through his work as mayor of M.-sur-M., as a philanthropist, and as a man of simple tastes and lifestyle. His love for Cosette is another way he redeems himself for his past wrongs. However, Valjean never seems able to fully emerge from the burden of the evil he's done. Internally, he struggles with whether or not he's really a good person—whether his actions and love are no more than a

façade concealing his true character, which may never be able to be modified. His past continues to haunt him in the external world as well: in his attempt to lead an ethical factory town, he is partly responsible for Fantine's downfall, and by freeing another man wrongly accused of being Jean Valjean, he is convicted once again and M.-sur-M. falls back into wretched poverty.

By choosing to center his account on a relatively minor failed revolt—June 1823—rather than the 1789 French Revolution, July Revolution of 1830, or Revolution of 1848, Hugo emphasizes the difficulty for French society itself (and not just individual characters) to redeem itself for past violence, inequality, and social ills. Love for one's neighbor seems to be the key to undoing these ills, though there isn't much optimism that, in society at large, love will in fact conquer all—at least in the short term. Nevertheless, Hugo portrays his subjects generously and sympathetically, suggesting that the novel lays claim to the possibility of redemption even while starkly depicting the complications in attaining it.

MERCY VS. JUDGMENT

The characters in the novel live in a world of consistently harsh judgment. Convicts and the poor are considered to be the dregs of society, while the rich, in turn, are assumed to be greedy and worth only as much as they can be tricked out of giving away. Women, especially, are subjected to difficult standards, placed on a pedestal of purity but easily and hastily condemned for diverging from this norm, while men who are promiscuous or simply carefree are celebrated rather than judged. Into this framework, the act of mercy enters as a powerful counterweight, at times shocking its recipients into a new way of life, but at other times proving overwhelming in its radical reversal of social norms.

As the novel begins, Jean Valjean is used to being treated and judged as the convict he is. He is therefore dumbfounded by the mercy that Bishop D— shows him in letting him go free after his attempt to steal the bishop's **silver candlesticks**. Valjean has no idea how to deal with the mercy shown to him—he is so confused, in fact, that his first move is to commit another crime of robbery, as he desperately tries to reaffirm the values of by which he's lived for so long. It takes this final criminal act, committed almost as a reflex, for Valjean to repent and embrace the mercy that the Bishop has shown him. Accepting mercy, then, can be excruciating, and takes profound will and grit. Javert, conversely, doesn't have such mental strength in the end. He finds he cannot live in the contradiction between the judgment he's bestowed upon Jean Valjean and the mercy that Valjean has shown to him, and he kills himself as a result. As a life transformation, the movement from judgment to mercy can be very painful, the novel reveals, even as Hugo celebrates mercy as the morally correct way to live.

JUSTICE AND INJUSTICE

Multiple systems of justice and injustice coexist in the novel. The characters—as well as the morally conscious narrator—must negotiate among all of them in attempting to assign responsibility to certain characters, and in determining how the ethical choices of each one of them compares to the others. No one system of justice triumphs for good in the novel. This is a somewhat radical move for Hugo, who, while embracing a Christian worldview, is less interested in simply parroting official Church authority than in trying, through fiction, to figure out the meaning of right and wrong.

One way of comparing justice to injustice is through the legal system, personified by Javert and illustrated in the various courts, juries, and policemen that appear throughout the novel. Yet by creating in Valjean a protagonist who is an escaped convict—one who, in fact, can only continue to do good by remaining *outside* the law—Hugo challenges the notion that legal justice is just at all. Of course, this notion is complicated, given that the novel doesn't portray those seeking legal justice as entirely evil or malicious. Instead, people like Javert are imperfect, perhaps overly zealous followers of the law who fail to understand that this authority can, in some cases, be unjust.

A potentially higher system of justice is the one developed by the Church—a system of justice that embraces mercy, as explained in an earlier theme. But this system also coexists with a system of individual morality, in which characters like Valjean have to weigh imperfect options. The most striking example of this is Valjean's choice to tell the truth and free a wrongly accused convict, even while accepting that this will lead to the downfall of M.-sur-M., rather than saving himself and the town by sacrificing the convict. In this context, what "justice" even means is less clear.

Through the diverse systems and examples employed in the book, Hugo develops a surprisingly modern understanding of morality, one in which justice depends on the person, the moment, and the stakes involved. What does "crime" mean when it is committed by someone whom society has abandoned—whom society has, to put it differently, committed its own crime against? In this context, justice and injustice are reversed, and it is up to the characters, and the reader, to establish their meaning.

HISTORY, REVOLUTION, AND PROGRESS

Les Misérables is saturated with French history, and a reader not already knowledgeable about the historical figures of Charles X or Louis-Philippe, for example, can easily get lost in all the detail. But this kind of detail plays a larger purpose in the novel. It is telling that Hugo sets his book in the context of a relatively minor revolt, the riots of July 1832, rather than the massive revolutions of 1789 or

1848. Hugo, while socially progressive, was skeptical about revolution—skeptical that a single dramatic event could turn the tide and improve social wellbeing for the downtrodden majority. Instead, the novel suggests that true revolution takes place slowly, incrementally, and that only such careful movement exemplifies real progress.

As in other cases, the novel prefers complexity over one single view in advancing this understanding of history and progress. The conversation between the Bishop and a member of the Convention (the French Revolution assembly that ended up descending into factions and leading to the period of the Terror, characterized by the use of the guillotine to behead people) reveals this ambiguity. The Convention member, now (in the 1810s) hated by society, suggests that none of the Convention's violence was any worse than what the populace had been subjected to under the king before the Revolution. The Bishop, on the other hand, cannot bring himself to accept that people had to be beheaded for the common good, but neither of them seems to win the argument. Revolution is therefore a mixed bag; because it is so dramatic and sudden, even its benefits are inevitably accompanied by drawbacks.

MYSTERY AND KNOWLEDGE IN PARIS

The novel is full of masks, costumes, mistaken identity, and concealment. Much of this mystery takes place in and is enabled by the winding streets of Paris, a city where characters can find anonymity and escape their pasts. Paris in the period of *Les Misérables* was not the city of wide-open boulevards that tourists know today. Before the 1850s, it was a largely medieval city of unknown alleys, an old, dank sewer system, and ancient walls and fortresses. Throughout the novel characters both take advantage of and are hindered by its mysteries.

Hugo wrote *Les Misérables* while abroad in political exile, and he lovingly depicts the city from afar, with lengthy asides on Parisian architecture and history. Jean Valjean is able to start a new life in Paris with Cosette because of the opportunities for concealment that the city affords.—Paris is a dynamic, changing city whose very identity varies with the changing identities of its inhabitants. The characters that can best take advantage of this aspect of Paris are the ones that possess the deepest knowledge of Paris's secrets, from its sewers to abandoned courtyards and dark alleyways. As an escaped convict, Jean Valjean is one of these characters, but the group of renegades that Thenardier employs to try to snare Valjean are also experts in Paris's mysteries—as is Gavroche, the young son Thenardier abandons, for whom Paris is a playground to be explored. Ultimately, Paris in the novel takes on the qualities of a character itself, allowing Hugo to explore the other themes of mercy and judgment, justice and injustice, that have Paris as their setting. The city becomes a microcosm of society at large, while also acting as a setting for other characters to discover how to master its ways and plumb its secrets.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

LIGHT AND DARKNESS

At several points in the novel, the narrator claims that the whole thrust of the book is from social evil to social good, proving that progress, while slow and complex, is inevitable. One way this movement is symbolized is through the progression from darkness into light. Darkness symbolizes the various kinds of evil that are enacted, consciously or unconsciously, in society: the abandonment of children, the despicable treatment of women, and the lack of mercy shown to those who have broken society's rules (like convicts). Light, on the other hand, comes to stand for knowledge, truth, mercy, and goodness—those who have "seen the light" no longer blindly follow society's judgmental assertions and assumptions.

The narrator often uses the language of light and darkness to imply this progress from social backwardness into a progressive society. But light and darkness, in turn, also fill the scenes of the novel, allowing the reader to associate certain characters and places with evil or with good. The members of the Patron-Minette criminal gang in Paris, for instance, only ever go out at night, in the darkness, while the Bishop of D— is often described as lit up in his very demeanor. Other characters pass through darkness on their way to the light. Cosette's moment of greatest despair comes as she wanders through the black forest at night to fetch water for the Thenardiers, while Valjean's greatest challenge is to carry Marius, whom he hates for taking Cosette away from him, through the ominous, gloomy, underground sewers of Paris. This journey from darkness to light, however, is considered necessary—the only way to achieve mercy and goodness.

THE BISHOP'S CANDLESTICKS

After being released from the galleys after nineteen years, Jean Valjean cannot imagine how to lead his life in any other way than through theft and concealment. When the Bishop shows kindness towards him by giving him dinner and a room for the night, Valjean is shock and overwhelmed, but is still unable to prevent himself from stealing the Bishop's ornate silver candlesticks and running away in the middle of the night. When he is brought back by the police, the Bishop exclaims that the candlesticks were a gift to Valjean, and that the policemen should let him go. The candlesticks thus symbolize the mercy shown to Valjean by the Bishop, as well as humility and goodness in the Bishop's lack of

interest in beautiful possessions and wealth. The candlesticks also reappear at various moments throughout the novel, as Valjean keeps them close to him as a reminder of the man and the act that began his transformation. That he nearly throws them into the fire at one point reveals just how closely Valjean equates the candlesticks with the Bishop's system of morality and mercy—by keeping them rather than throwing them out, Valjean recommits himself to the new path he's chosen.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Canterbury Classics edition of *Les Miserables* published in 2015.

Volume 1, Book 1 Quotes

"The guilty one is not the person who has committed the sin, but the person who has created the shadow."

Related Characters: Charles-François-Bienvenu Myriel (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

The Bishop Bienvenu, the first major character to whom we are introduced in the book, is portrayed as a source of great wisdom and kindness, not to mention a figure who encapsulates much of Victor Hugo's social message. This quotation is part of a longer set of passages in which we learn of various extracts from what the bishop preaches to his congregation, as well as examples of the bishop's own actions throughout the community.

The bishop treats women and children, who are often dismissed as less important by much of society, with even greater care than others. Indeed, he insists that those who are looked down on by others, whether because of their own actions or because of social conventions, do not deserve that judgment. Instead, responsibility for their actions should be displaced onto those who have "created the shadow"—that is, those individuals and, more precisely, society at large, which have condemned certain groups of people to live apart from or as inferiors to others, thus making it nearly inevitable that those groups will fail or suffer at some point. The bishop is thus shown to have a broader sense of what injustice means, particularly on a structural level, than many others. Even other religious figures in France at the time—men who are supposed to be epitomes of mercy and forgiveness—often exhibit judgment, corruption, and injustice instead, and so Bishop Bienvenu acts as shining example of how the clergy can be a force for good in an unjust world.

"Let us never fear robbers nor murderers. Those are dangers from without, petty dangers. Let us fear ourselves. Prejudices are the real robbers; vices are the real murderers. The great dangers lie within ourselves."

Related Characters: Charles-François-Bienvenu Myriel (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

The Bishop has just received a gold chest filled with valuable items obviously stolen from cathedrals: it is a "gift" from Cravatte, a known bandit, meant to challenge and make fun of the Bishop. Rather than being upset or angry, though, the Bishop just smiles. Later that night he proclaims this message about the greater importance of fearing prejudice and vice than robbers and murderers. The Bishop makes a distinction between external and internal dangers: the former are "petty," and therefore not to be feared, while the internal dangers are the ones that can truly prove damaging.

This message is part of the Bishop's general emphasis towards acknowledging that everyone is sinful, that all have evil within themselves, and that all should be dealt with mercifully as a result. Rather than showing hatred or anger towards the person who attempted to threaten him, the Bishop greets his challenge with love, as well as disarming the challenge by claiming that it really doesn't represent a threat at all. As a truly sincere religious man ought to be, Bienvenu is more concerned with his soul than his physical health, and so fears his own prejudices more than external robbers. Unfortunately, the Bishop's high-minded ideas are not shared by the majority of society, as Hugo goes on to show in great detail.

Volume 1, Book 2 Quotes

After having judged society, which had caused his unhappiness, he judged Providence, which had made society, and he condemned it also.

Related Characters: Jean Valjean

Related Themes:

Page Number: 79

Explanation and Analysis

Jean Valjean had originally been sentenced to prison for stealing a loaf of bread when he was starving; after multiple escape attempts and increasingly harsher sentences, he ultimately served a total of nineteen years in prison. The narrator asks the reader to pause for a moment and consider how Jean Valjean was transformed from a weak, desperate adolescent into a hardened criminal. He traces Valjean's actions over the course of his life, and asks us to seek to understand rather than judge Valjean immediately.Judgment, in fact, is the choice Valjean makes as a result of being disillusioned and hardened in the galleys. The narrator shows how Valjean, while initially acknowledging that he did wrong, came to question the severity of his sentence and, ultimately, to decide that society itself was worthy of condemnation—and, since God created society, Valjean would condemn all of the divine as well.

The narrator has a difficult task here, since it is necessary to show both that there was injustice in the sentencing of Jean Valjean, but also that the proper response to such injustice is mercy rather than further hatred. This second step, we are told, is where Valjean went awry—and yet even so, we as readers are asked not to judge him ourselves, particularly because his situation was so unjust, and because we have yet to get a measure of his true character.

Volume 1, Book 5 Quotes

❝ This man was composed of two very simple and two very good sentiments, comparatively; but he rendered them almost bad, by dint of exaggerating them—respect for authority, hatred of rebellion; and in his eyes, murder, robbery, all crimes, are only forms of rebellion.

Related Characters: Javert

Related Themes:

Page Number: 149

Explanation and Analysis

Here we are introduced to Javert, the policeman who will serve as Jean Valjean's nemesis for most of the rest of the novel. Yet even this antagonist is shown as not entirely evil, but rather subject to multiple, conflicting impulses that should be examined and understood before they are fully condemned. "Respect for authority" and "hatred of rebellion" are, according to the logic of the novel, not negative traits *per se,* since they can be mapped onto the understanding of justice that the novel has already begun to sketch. However,the problem comes when, as in Javert's case, these justifiable sentiments are exaggerated such that they come to obsess him and replace any other kind of moral standard. As a result, Javert sees all crimes only as forms of rebellion. He fails to see, as those like the Bishop do, that there may be other reasons, even understandable reasons, for people to commit such crimes. Javert's black-and-white way of viewing the world is proven to be dangerously inadequate, particularly in the complex world of misunderstandings, moral quandaries, and structural injustices that Hugo portrays.

Volume 1, Book 7 Quotes

❝ Judges, clerks, gendarmes, a throng of cruelly curious heads, all these he had already beheld once, in days gone by, twenty-seven years before; he had encountered those fatal things once more; there they were; they move; they existed; it was no longer an effort of his memory, a mirage of his thought; they were real gendarmes and real judges, a real crowd, and real men of flesh and blood: it was all over; he beheld the monstrous aspects of his past reappear and live once more around him, with all that there is formidable in reality.

Related Characters: Jean Valjean

Related Themes:

Page Number: 230

Explanation and Analysis

Madeleine (Valjean) has been lurking behind the courtroom door, still undecided as to whether or not he will enter and reveal himself to be Jean Valjean, thus saving an innocent man from the galleys. Finally he bursts through the doors, only to witness a scene that makes him relive the most painful moments from his own time in the galleys and his own trial, events which remain acutely vivid to him even after 27 years. Through his new life of faith and good works as Father Madeleine, Valjean has convinced himself that he has paid for his past crimes, and that some kind of redemption exists for what he did in the past.

Now, it appears to him that what he has learned to think of as abstract, distant events are fully real and present. His past was not a dream or nightmare, but a reality from which

he cannot escape. This powerful passage underlines for Valjean that, no matter what he does, the dream he has of redeeming his past sins remains tantalizingly out of reach.

Volume 2, Book 1 Quotes

If you wish to gain an idea of what revolution is, call it Progress; and if you wish to acquire an idea of the nature of progress, call it To-morrow. Tomorrow fulfills its work irresistibly, and it is already fulfilling it today.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 303

Explanation and Analysis

In the first book of the second volume, the narrator makes a long digression on the battle of Waterloo—although the word "digression" fails to account for how much the book's logic is tied to the historical and revolutionary themes that arise in this section as well as in others. The narrator has expressed doubt on the question of whether or not Waterloo was, all things considered, a positive event: he thinks there was too much destruction and violence for this to be the case. However, he also suggests that smaller political changes, such as a constitutional charter, did come as a result of the battle.

Nonetheless, these small changes fit into a larger theory about the inevitability of progress in history. Revolutions and battles may fail, but the march towards greater equality will continue to take place "irresistibly." In some ways, this narrative suggests that there is little people need to do in order to enact change, since change will happen with or without them. But alongside this fatalism is a more optimistic outlook in the implication that despite setbacks and failures, things will inevitably keep moving forward and improving.

Volume 2, Book 4 Quotes

Only, as he was five and fifty, and Cosette eight years of age, all that might have been love in the whole course of his life flowed together into a sort of ineffable light. It was the second white apparition which he had encountered. The Bishop had caused the dawn of virtue to rise on his horizon; Cosette caused the dawn of love to rise.

Related Characters: Charles-François-Bienvenu Myriel, Cosette, Jean Valjean

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 379

Explanation and Analysis

Here Jean Valjean's life is, as is often the case, portrayed as being divided into several stages, beginning with the darkness of his life in the galleys, before the "dawn" of his redemption through the Bishop. Now this dawn is further divided into two parts: that of virtue and that of love. Valjean, at 55 years old, has never had the chance to love someone as a wife, for instance, or as a child of his own. Cosette is almost too young to be his own daughter, and the wide age gap between them underlines how much Valjean has lived in the darkness without love or virtue in his life. However, his relationship to Cosette is meant to show that it is not, in fact, too late for him to gain some of what he has missed over the years. The "ineffable light" that characterizes his meeting with the child and will characterize his subsequent life with her suggests that there is, in fact, a possibility for Valjean's past sins to be redeemed by taking care of someone who needs his help now.

Volume 2, Book 8 Quotes

The scaling of that wall, the passing of those barriers, the adventure accepted even at the risk of death, the painful and difficult ascent, all those efforts even, which he had made to escape from that other place of expiation, he had made in order to gain entrance into this one. Was this a symbol of his destiny? This house was a prison likewise and bore a melancholy resemblance to that other one whence he had fled, and yet he had never conceived an idea of anything similar.

Related Characters: Jean Valjean

Related Themes:

Page Number: 495

Explanation and Analysis

As Jean Valjean settles into life with Cosette at the convent, he thinks back on how they have arrived at this life and what it means in light of his own past. The two landed in the convent purely by accident—in a frantic, tense escape from Javert and his men, Valjean had managed to scramble over a wall and cart Colette with him before falling into the

convent garden.

Of course, the "barriers" and "efforts" that Valjean mentions are also metaphorical in nature: they stand for all his struggles to redeem his past sins. Valjean muses on the irony of the fact that this convent bears some resemblance to a prison, which he attempted to escape in a similar way (scaling walls, for example) so many times: both are places shut out from the outside world, with their own rules and assumptions, even if those in the convent have chosen to be there. Still, Valjean wonders if the convent is not after all a sign that he will have a chance to redeem himself—or if, instead, it will only underline how little his love for Cosette can change his past. Valjean thus also sees the convent as, like the prison, a house of judgment and a decider of what passes for justice.

Volume 3, Book 1 Quotes

❝ The gamin expresses Paris, and Paris expresses the world. For Paris is a total. Paris is the ceiling of the human race. The whole of this prodigious city is a foreshortening of dead manners and living manners. He who sees Paris thinks he sees the bottom of all history with heaven and constellations in the intervals.

Related Characters: Gavroche

Related Themes:

Page Number: 510

Explanation and Analysis

In this book the narrator begins a long study of a certain Parisian character, one of many character sketches that he paints throughout the book. Ultimately, he will use this sketch in order to characterize the figure of Gavroche. Here, however, the description remains largely abstract. The character of the gamin—a street urchin who knows Paris inside and out, who is both charming and troublesome, innocent and wily—comes to represent the inconsistent and wildly diverse universe that is the city of Paris. Paris, indeed, is its own world in the novel: rather than possessing several unique characteristics itself, which might differentiate it from another city, it swallows up every trait imaginable, as well as every historical period. The narrator emphasizes how Paris is built up on the "dead manners" and dead realities of the past, but in such a way that they continue to influence and shine through to the present, creating a richer and more powerful whole. Even as he depicts the criminal behavior of the Parisian gamin, then, the narrator also expresses a more optimistic viewpoint on Paris as a place of possibility and potential progress.

Volume 3, Book 7 Quotes

❝ The wild spectres who roam in this grave, almost beasts, almost phantoms, are not occupied with universal progress; they are ignorant both of the idea and of the word; they take no thought for anything but the satisfaction of their individual desires. They are almost unconscious, and there exists within them a sort of terrible obliteration. They have two mothers, both step-mothers, ignorance and misery...

Related Themes:

Page Number: 623

Explanation and Analysis

Here the narrator characterizes what he calls the "third lower floor" of human society. This phrase, originally used in the theater, designates certain traits and resentments that remain under the surface, before bubbling up at times of great strife. The "wild spectres" will soon be given names—they are the hardened criminals who will take on a more important role later on—but here, as earlier, the narrator takes the opportunity to paint a picture of the group as a social phenomenon and category. There seems to be a fascination in the passage about the very existence of such a group, one part of the amazing diversity of Parisian existence.

On one hand, this passage stresses how far apart this category lies from the optimistic ideals of progress and change that the novel has been advocating earlier. These people care far more about their own individual well-being than about anything larger than themselves. However, we also see that the "spectres" are not to be entirely condemned. As usual, we are asked to trace present action and character back to earlier moments and possible causes. "Ignorance" and "misery," which we are told are at the root of their actions, are personified and named as their "two mothers." The effect of this is to emphasize just how direct these roots are—as close, indeed, as the relationship of a mother to a child. Thus the "character" of this criminal underworld may be cruel and selfish, but it also stems from previous injustices and sufferings of which the criminals themselves are innocent.

Volume 3, Book 8 Quotes

The Jondrette lair was, if the reader recalls what we have said of the Gorbeau building, admirably chosen to serve as the theatre of a violent and somber deed, and as the envelope for a crime. It was the most retired chamber in the most isolated house on the most deserted boulevard in Paris. If the system of ambush and traps had not already existed, they would have been invented here.

Related Characters: Eponine, Madame Thenardier, Thenardier (Jondrette)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 674

Explanation and Analysis

Marius has been spying on the Jondrette "lair" from the peep-hole of his own room, and he has been growing increasingly concerned that someone is in great danger, as the family is obviously plotting some kind of crime. In this brief digression, we learn how ideal indeed this hovel would be for a crime. Instead of studying human beings, whether as abstract "characters" or as individuals, here the narrator turns his sociological lens on a particular site within Paris. In some ways, he seems to be suggesting that crime is inevitable in such a place. But in other ways he is, once again, seeking to trace certain behaviors back to their origin—here, the dismal, poverty-stricken surroundings in which these characters find themselves. Rather than it being a question of condemning or withholding judgment, it is a question of seeking to understand and explain the source of these people's anger and criminality.

He had found him at last, and how? His father's savior was a ruffian! That man, to whose service Marius was burning to devote himself, was a monster! The liberator of Colonel Pontmercy was on the point of committing a crime whose scope Marius did not, as yet, clearly comprehend, but which resembled an assassination! And against whom, great God! What a fatality! What a bitter mockery of fate!

Related Characters: Thenardier (Jondrette), Marius

Related Themes:

Page Number: 683

Explanation and Analysis

Having eavesdropped for some time at the peep-hole, Marius finally hears Jondrette's true name, Thenardier—the name of the person that his father begged him to thank one day, since he had (supposedly) saved Marius's father on the battlefield. Now Marius has to come to terms with the fact that he both knows this man to be a despicable criminal, and knows him to be his father's savior and hero. This series of exclamations register Marius's shock—it is, of course, a great coincidence—and his scrambling attempts to determine what to do.

To Marius, this new revelation is a "mockery" of how fate *ought* to be because, after having spent his life pursuing his father's savior to thank him, he finds himself with no good solution: either Marius betrays his father and calls for Javert to barge in and arrest Thenardier, or Marius risks the safety of Leblanc, an innocent man. Neither way seems particularly ethical or high-minded, and so he is caught having to make an impossible decision. Marius had always assumed that his love for his father would ensure that he he could fulfill his father's dying wish: now it seems that no such redeeming action is possible.

Volume 4, Book 1 Quotes

Encourage the wealthy, and protect the poor, suppress misery, put an end to the unjust farming out of the feeble by the strong, put a bridle on the iniquitous jealousy of the man who is making his way against the man who has reached the goal, adjust, mathematically and fraternally, salary to labor, mingle gratuitous and compulsory education with the growth of childhood, and make of science the base of manliness, develop minds while keeping arms busy, be at one and the same time a powerful people and a family of happy men, render property democratic, not by abolishing it, but by making it universal, so that every citizen, without exception, may be a proprietor, an easier matter than is generally supposed; in two words, learn how to produce wealth and how to distribute it, and you will have at once moral and material greatness; and you will be worthy to call yourself France.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 726

Explanation and Analysis

In these "few pages of history," we learn some of the historical context of the years prior to the novel's action, particularly the years after the Revolution of 1830, known as the July Monarchy. This attempted compromise between democracy and royalty could never work, it is argued here, even though the king, Louis-Philippe, was well-intentioned.

The narrator judges capitalism, communism, and socialism as means of ensuring progress for all, and considers only socialism to seek to remedy more than a single part of the problem. However, he expresses frustration with the priority of abstract ideals throughout this time period, as opposed to a focus on the real, material needs of the French people.

Here the narrator proposes some potential solutions of his own to the unjust, unequal state of society, solutions that in fact range from the abstract to the specific and from the radical to the widely accepted. His views on education, for instance, were shared by many around the time; his views on property, however, show an interesting if unusual compromise between communism, which wanted to abolish all property, and capitalism, which is built on the basis of private property. To "learn how to produce wealth and how to distribute it" is shown to be not just the basis of material wealth: it is the source of the moral well-being of France, which is why so much time is spent on these material questions.

Volume 4, Book 2 Quotes

❝ Happy, even in the midst of anguish, is he to whom God has given a soul worthy of love and of unhappiness! He who has not viewed the things of this world and the heart of man under this double light has seen nothing and knows nothing of the true.

Related Characters: Marius

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 744

Explanation and Analysis

Marius has failed to learn much more about the young girl he immediately was drawn to, whom he now calls "the Lark," and has become so depressed that he has stopped working and has grown even poorer than he was before. However, he continues to grasp onto the idea that the Lark, who had glanced back at him shyly, might possibly have reciprocal feelings for him. Here the narrator suggests that there is a redeeming quality even to love that is as painful as what Marius is feeling. This kind of unhappiness is acknowledged as unpleasant, even excruciating. But the book will emphasize its own view on love—that it is worth loving not despite but *because* of the suffering, which allows people to glimpse what is true in the world.

Volume 4, Book 3 Quotes

❝ When Cosette went out with him, she leaned on his arm, proud and happy, in the plenitude of her heart. Jean Valjean felt his heart melt within him with delight, at all these sparks of a tenderness so exclusive, so wholly satisfied with himself alone. The poor man trembled, inundated with angelic joy; he declared to himself ecstatically that this would last all their lives; he told himself that he really had not suffered sufficiently to merit so radiant a bliss, and he thanked God, in the depths of his soul, for having permitted him to be loved thus, he, a wretch, by that innocent being.

Related Characters: Cosette, Jean Valjean

Related Themes:

Page Number: 769

Explanation and Analysis

Cosette and Jean Valjean have settled into yet another new life, this time on the Rue Plumet, and this time with Valjean going by the name of Ultime Fauchelevent. However, this time Valjean truly does allow himself to believe that he might be given the chance to love Cosette and to enjoy living with her, rather than having it all be snatched away from him as it nearly has so many times.

Still, Valjean continues to feel a great unworthiness, a sense that he has not "suffered sufficiently" in order to be able to at last enjoy great happiness. The difference, here, is that he has chosen not to despair over the evil that has lurked inside him, but instead chooses to be grateful for the small loving family that he now has with Cosette. He may not believe that he has redeemed himself for past actions, but he simply enjoys what he has while it is present.

❝ "Father, are they still men?"

Related Characters: Cosette (speaker), Jean Valjean

Related Themes:

Page Number: 786

Explanation and Analysis

Cosette and Jean Valjean are on one of their early-morning walks, when they come across a sorrowful procession of

men tied to each other on their way to the galleys although when the light hits their faces they grow more jovial and begin to sing. Cosette doesn't understand what she is seeing, but she is frightened by the sight anyway. Valjean does explain to her who the men are and where they are going: it is at this point that she asks if they are "still men." Such a question is obviously excruciating for Valjean, who has lived through what the men they now watch are going through, although he can never tell anyone about this. Cosette's question reveals her own innocent but also immature mind, as well as the prejudices of society that have already influenced her, as she questions the very humanity of the prisoners. Still, Valjean ends up answering "sometimes" to her question, suggesting that one's humanity *can* be lost when condemned to the galleys. Cosette seems afraid rather than malicious or gleeful like other observers of the prisoners, but Valjean can now only wonder what she would think of him should she know his own past.

Volume 4, Book 6 Quotes

❝ The bourgeois decked out in their Sunday finery who passed the elephant of the Bastille, were fond of saying as they scanned it disdainfully with their prominent eyes: “What’s the good of that?” It served to save from the cold, the frost, the hail, and rain to shelter from the winds of winter, to preserve from slumber in the mud which produces fever, and from slumber in the snow which produces death, a little being who had no father, no mother, no bread, no clothes, no refuge. It served to receive the innocent whom society repulsed.

Related Characters: Gavroche

Related Themes:

Page Number: 825

Explanation and Analysis

At this point in the story we have returned to the "gamin" Gavroche, whom we now learn sometimes works with the gang of Paris underworld criminals including Montparnasse. Gavroche lives in what he calls "the elephant," once a monumental project by Napoleon to build a 40-foot-tall wooden elephant with a tower perched on top. Most Parisians have forgotten about it by now, and those who do pass by and notice it are quick to scorn it as useless and ugly. They are not interested in the elephant even as a curious reminder of the past layers of Parisian existence.

However, the elephant shelter also has more profound meaning in this section. The narrator argues that the elephant is unfairly maligned for being ugly, and claims that its real strength is a moral one, in that it can provide for poor, hungry, lonely children whom society has otherwise "repulsed." The "good of that," a statement apparently meant rhetorically, is then shifted onto another register, one of ethics rather than economics.

Volume 4, Book 7 Quotes

❝ Slang is language turned convict. That the thinking principle of man be thrust down ever so low, that it can be dragged and pinioned there by obscure tyrannies of fatality, that it can be bound by no one knows what fetters in that abyss, is sufficient to create consternation. Oh, poor thought of miserable wretches! Alas! Will no one come to the succor of the human soul in that darkness?

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 855

Explanation and Analysis

As part of his digression on language and criminality, the narrator deals here with the particular kinds of language used by convicts, that is, slang. The narrator is deeply ambivalent about the use of slang: he admits that it can be a powerful tool for weak people, but he cannot bring himself to enjoy or approve of the dirty words and raucous mentality that goes along with using slang. But here, as elsewhere, the history of this linguistic phenomenon is shown to be more significant and more revelatory than a mere study of the people who use it. Those people are characterized as being "in the darkness," but that status also suggests that the darkness was not of their own making, especially since it is suggested that no one will come "to the succor" of their souls. Slang thus becomes a sign of a state of injustice more than of a character to be condemned.

Volume 4, Book 13 Quotes

❝ War does not become a disgrace, the sword does not become a disgrace, except when it is used for assassinating the right, progress, reason, civilization, truth. Then war, whether foreign or civil, is iniquitous; it is called crime. Outside the pale of that holy thing, justice, by what right does one form of man despise another?

Related Themes:

Page Number: 965

Explanation and Analysis

During the barricade, Marius fights valiantly, even as he is worried about Cosette and anxious that he will never be able to see her again. He also is ashamed when he thinks back to his father's heroic actions at war: when he compares those actions to his own fighting, he feels that this civil war is paltry compared to the significant battles of the past. But the narrator claims that instead of drawing a line between foreign and civil wars, one should create a distinction between just and unjust wars. A just war is one that fights for progress and for truth: an unjust one tries to take those things away, and is not only wrong, but a "crime." The narrator reiterates the book's argument that hate among people is not justifiable, and fighting among them is only necessary in the interest of movement towards justice, progress, and equality.

Volume 5, Book 1 Quotes

❝ There is something of the apocalypse in civil war, all the mists of the unknown are commingled with fierce flashes, revolutions are sphinxes, and any one who has passed through a barricade thinks he has traversed a dream.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1050

Explanation and Analysis

Much of this volume is taken up with detailed, carefully depicted descriptions of the barricade and the fighting within it. At the most recent moment of fighting, Gavroche has been killed, and Enjolras has remarked that Valjean (though no one knows who he is) is managing to fight well without killing anyone. Now the narrator pauses for a more abstract description of these barricades. He depicts them here almost as another feature of Parisian life, among the many sociological categories, neighborhoods, and historical and architectural features that he has pointed our attention to before. He implies here that barricades, long a tool used by the weaker and more vulnerable side in French and European battles, recall these historical fights for those who pass through them. In a way, then, there is little that is more real or more historically rich than a barricade—but at the same time, this vivid, rich fullness of the past makes the barricade seem paradoxically unreal or dreamlike for those who pass through it.

❝ He who despairs is in the wrong. Progress infallibly awakes, and, in short, we may say that it marches on, even when it is asleep, for it has increased in size. When we behold it erect once more, we find it taller. To be always peaceful does not depend on progress any more than it does on the stream; erect no barriers, cast in no boulders; obstacles make water froth and humanity boil. Hence arise troubles; but after these troubles, we recognize the fact that ground has been gained. Until order, which is nothing else than universal peace, has been established, until harmony and unity reign, progress will have its revolutions as its halting-places.

Related Characters: Marius

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1057

Explanation and Analysis

The fighting at the barricades has been going on for a long time, and it is slowly becoming clear that the revolutionaries are on the losing side, and that soon they will be definitively defeated. Marius begins to despair, but here the book suggests that despair is not the correct attitude to take when loss seems inevitable. This is true if one takes one of the book's central themes to be correct: that is, that progress is inevitable, despite periodic setbacks and even what seem like damning failures.

Indeed, the narrator notes here that troubles are necessary to ensure that progress happens, for without turmoil and obstacles no change happens—and in addition, such change will happen for the better. Before this, the book has been somewhat ambivalent on the nature of revolution: the belief in the importance of respecting the humanity of others, of preventing violence, coexists uneasily with a desire for revolutions that require violence to even occur. Here, though, the narrator expresses the greatest good of revolutions, which is their status as stepping-stones towards progress and greater justice.

Volume 5, Book 3 Quotes

❝ As he emerged from the water, he came in contact with a stone and fell upon his knees. He reflected that this was but just, and he remained there for some time, with his soul absorbed in words addressed to God. He rose to his feet, shivering, chilled, foul-smelling, bowed beneath the dying man whom he was dragging after him, all dripping with slime, and his soul filled with a strange light.

Related Characters: Marius, Jean Valjean

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 1108

Explanation and Analysis

This entire section of the book is both an adventure story, as Valjean drags Marius through the grime and mud of the sewers in an attempt to save him, and a metaphorical journey, as Valjean relives the darkness of his earlier life in a heroic struggle to reach the light. This is the moment at which all seems lost, as Valjean begins to struggle amid the quicksand and is brought down to his knees, fearing he might be drowned.

At the last moment, he strikes a hard surface, a stone. For Valjean this is not just a lucky coincidence but a sign that he should thank God, a direct result of God's providence and of the possibility that he might, after all, be redeemed. The rest of the passage paints a stark contrast between Valjean's physical state and his emotional and spiritual experience. As he gets to his feet, he is cold and "foul-smelling." He does not even know if Marius will survive this monumental attempt to drag him through the sewers to safety. However, the "strange light" that fills him both reflects how Valjean feels he has been saved by God and represents the new strength he feels that will allow him to carry on until the end.

Volume 5, Book 4 Quotes

❝ His supreme anguish was the loss of certainty. He felt that he had been uprooted [...] A whole new world was dawning on his soul: kindness accepted and repaid, devotion, mercy, indulgence, violences committed by pity on austerity, respect for persons, no more definitive condemnation, no more conviction, the possibility of a tear in the eye of the law, no one knows what justice according to God, running in inverse sense to justice according to men. He perceived amid the shadows the terrible rising of an unknown moral sun: it horrified and dazzled him.

Related Characters: Javert

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 1129

Explanation and Analysis

We had been introduced to Javert as a man of principles, two principles in fact: love of authority and distrust of rebellion. Now, he has recognized that Valjean, the rebellious, anti-authority criminal that he has been chasing all throughout the novel, is actually a profoundly good person. Almost without thinking, Javert has let him go free, after seeing how he was solely concerned with bringing Marius to safety. Now the careful, principled life that Javert had created for himself is suddenly dissolving. He begins to realize that there are other principles worthy of being followed that he had never believed suitable before. Rather than rules of law and punishment, these are also rules of mercy, forgiveness, and respect.

However, the realization of such a different "moral sun" is not a relief for Javert: on the contrary, it is the source of panic and confusion. It is not that Javert has lived as a criminal himself his entire life, and is only now seeing the "light," but rather that the life he thought was occupied with justice now appears to be entirely unjust. But Javert has not made the step of embracing this new system either. Instead, he is left in a kind of moral void, one that is excruciating because it makes him feel as if nothing is certain, nothing justifiable.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PREFACE

The narrator begins by stating that his book will remain of use as long as society continues to degrade its inhabitants through poverty, hunger, ignorance, and shame.

Though Les Misérables is a novel, the narrator immediately notes its relevance to social issues and asks the reader to keep them in mind.

VOLUME 1, BOOK 1: A JUST MAN

Chapter 1 We learn the name of the Bishop of "D----" (the town's real name isn't given), an old man named Charles-François-Bienvenu Myriel. He was the son of a man of Parliament, and he spent his younger years devoted to worldly affairs. But during the French Revolution, he was forced to emigrate to Italy, and his wife died before having children. The narrator isn't sure if it was the tragedy in his own family, the revolutionary madness of 1793, or something else, but when Myriel returned, he had become a priest.

Readers expecting a straightforward immersion into the protagonist's life might be surprised by this introduction. Hugo, as we'll see, is not afraid to enter obliquely into a narrative, here by painting a full picture of a bishop whose path Jean Valjean (the book's protagonist) will only cross later on. The French Revolution will also be a major point of historical reference throughout the book.

Around the turn of the century, when he was still just a priest, Myriel went to Paris to ask for aid for his parishioners. He was waiting to speak to Cardinal Fesch, the uncle of Napoleon, when Napoleon himself entered the anteroom and asked who this good man was. The Bishop said he might be good, but Napoleon was a great man. Soon after, he was surprised to learn that he had been appointed Bishop of D----.

Napoleon was Emperor of France following the brief republic of the French Revolution, and many French (even clergy members) admired him for his courage in war and his desire to extend France's borders (and with it, its values and traditions) throughout Europe.

Though D---- is a small town where gossip and rumors rule, after around nine years, any rumors about the Bishop had dissipated. Myriel had arrived with his sister, Mademoiselle Baptistine, a spinster ten years younger than he was, and with a servant of the same age, Madame Magloire. Mademoiselle Baptistine is a respectable woman, not pretty, but deeply good, though her goodness seems to make her **light** and transparent, merely a conduit for her soul's eventual ascent to heaven.

Both these women serve a largely ornamental purpose in the novel, their purpose remaining one of obedience to and respect for the Bishop. By showing how deeply good of a person Mademoiselle Baptistine is, the text can show more clearly how remarkable is the Bishop's even greater emphasis on charity, modesty, and good works.

Chapter 2 In D----, the episcopal palace—a huge, grand house where the Bishop is installed—had in the past welcomed major political figures from Paris, and is home to opulent furniture. It's located next to the small, narrow town hospital, which the Bishop visits after his arrival. He asks the director how many sick people there are in the hospital presently: there are 26. He notes that the beds are crowded, there isn't much light, and the hospital can be overwhelmed. The director asks what can be done other than resign himself. The Bishop is quiet and asks how many beds his own dining room would hold—he gathers it would be around 20. He says there's been a mistake—the two of them must switch houses. The next day the Bishop settles into the hospital, while the 36 patients are installed in the palace.

This story is the first example of the Bishop's radical belief in making do with as little as possible so as to help those who are less fortunate. He does not make this move with great fanfare. Instead, it appears that he truly is surprised by the opulence of his own mansion and its contrast to the hospital, and merely thinks of this as a disparity that must be corrected. Corruption among the clergy was a source of discontent and suspicion with French people at this time, and the Bishop reflects an alternative to what he sees as an injustice among those who are supposed to serve God.

Myriel, whose family was ruined in the Revolution, has no property, and receives 15,000 francs yearly from the State. At the beginning of his stay, he draws up a note of expenses. He declares only 1,000 francs for his personal expenses, and the rest for charity. Mademoiselle Baptistine admires and venerates her brother and submits to his every wish. It's only Madame Magloire who is a little unhappy with the situation. After about three months, she tells the Bishop that he hasn't even claimed the allowance due to him for a customary town carriage. The General Council votes him an annual sum of 3,000 francs, but the local bourgeois inhabitants are indignant at this expense, which seems extravagant for such a small town. One General Council member writes a letter to a minister claiming that all priests are greedy and live in luxury. Madame Magloire, however, is delighted at the 3,000 francs. That night the Bishop writes out a note of expenses, devoting all 3,000, again, to various charitable donations.

If there's an ethical hierarchy to be set up in this household, Mademoiselle Baptistine probably occupies the intermediate position, not actively seeking ways to give away the household wealth but also happily complying with her brother's ideas. Madame Magloire doesn't come out too highly here, though she's hardly a greedy spendthrift—as the servant of the household, she simply wants to do her job well. The book therefore shows how truly radical the Bishop's desires are, as well as how they go against the stereotypes held by townspeople about greedy priests—judgments that are still socially entrenched despite the Bishop's charitable actions.

Money offerings and alms soon flow in, and those who have little of their own begin to knock at the Bishop's door to collect them. Though he becomes a kind of treasurer or cashier, he's never tempted to add anything to his bare necessities. The peasants of the town begin to call the Bishop Monseigneur Bienvenu [Welcome], which pleases him.

People are beginning to realize that there's something different about this priest, and their judgment slowly turns into affection and love. The process of undoing an atmosphere of stinginess and suspicion is difficult, but ultimately attainable.

Chapter 3 Though the Bishop lacks a carriage, he still manages to visit the dozens of chapels and vicarships in the area, on foot or cart. One day he arrives at the ancient city of Senez mounted on an ass (donkey), the only means of transport he could afford. People in the village begin to laugh, and the mayor seems scandalized. The Bishop apologizes for what he says must seem arrogant—riding the same animal that was used by Jesus Christ.

Small anecdotes like these allow the narrator to marshal further support for the idea that the Bishop is truly good, the "real deal," and not somehow tricking the populace. At each turn, the Bishop manages to display greater humility, seeming to care little for social norms that dictate the regular rules of judgment.

During his visits, the Bishop is kind rather than harsh, using stories and examples from neighboring villages he's visited to show why people should be generous and kind to their neighbors. In other cases, he invents parables that are direct rather than obtuse, so that people can understand them better.

The Catholic Church was also known at this time for its complex rituals and lack of direct contact between priests and the people. The Bishop counters this, interacting with the poor and trying to actually change the way people act.

Chapter 4 The Bishop is cheerful and enjoys joking around. One day he tries to reach a book on an upper shelf of his library, but he's short and can't reach it. He asks Madame Magloire to fetch him a chair, since his "grandeur" doesn't reach as high as the shelf.

Though he's humble, meek, and generous, the Bishop, as the narrator wants to make clear, isn't joyless—it's possible to do good without being overly serious and somber.

Once, during Lent, a young vicar comes to preach on charity, telling the rich to give to the poor to avoid hell (which he portrays in vivid, terrifying detail). A wealthy merchant named M. Geborand, who had never given to the poor in his life, begins to give a sou (5 centimes, or 1/20 of a franc) each Sunday to the beggar at the cathedral door. The Bishop remarks that there goes M. Geborand, buying paradise for a sou.

For the Bishop, the terrors of hell are not a good reason to give to the poor. One should be generous simply because it's the right thing to do, rather than as an instrumental step towards a selfish goal. The story again shows the Bishop's sense of humor and irony.

The Bishop constantly reminds his congregation of the suffering of the poor. He adopts the peasants' dialects wherever he goes. He treats everyone from all classes the same, and isn't quick to judge, since he says he himself is an ex-sinner. He's indulgent towards women and the poor, since they are treated the worst of all society. He says that society is in fact guilty for the ignorance of those who commit sins.

It's unclear how the Bishop spent his former life, but it seems that his sincere mercy and understanding come from having seen a lot of the world, and perhaps not always having been so saintly. His notion of societal guilt for individual sin will be taken up by other characters, and Hugo himself.

One day the Bishop hears a criminal case about a very poor man who had coined counterfeit money to support his lover and child. The woman, the only source of proof, had been caught, and she refused to accuse her lover. Then her attorney made up a story about her lover's infidelity, giving her scraps of supposed letters as proof. She was distraught and confessed everything, and the man was ruined. He was now waiting to be tried. The Bishop listens to this in silence, and then asks where the man will be tried. Then he asks where his *attorney* will be tried.

Others, especially religious people, might immediately condemn this man and woman as adulterers, fraudsters, and general sinners. Not only does the Bishop show mercy and forgiveness towards these people, but he also inverts the hierarchy of justice and injustice, such that it's the one prosecuting the crime that should, in fact, be subject to a trial and be considered guilty.

Not long after, a somewhat uneducated man from D--- is sentenced to death for murder, in a trial of great interest to the public. The day before the execution, the town priest refuses to attend to the prisoner in his last moments, so the Bishop volunteers to. He spends the entire day with him, speaking with and consoling him, until he is able to "see **light**." The next day the Bishop mounts the scaffold with him, and the man seems calm and reconciled to his fate. As the Bishop descends from the scaffold, people admire both his deathly pale face and his calm. Some wealthier townspeople call this an act, but the regular people recognize holy deeds when they see them.

Again the Bishop inverts the usual categories and hierarchies of justice and injustice by showing compassion to a man condemned by both the law and society. He also reveals the hypocrisy of people when they show such interest in other people's suffering, without acknowledging their own sins. This is also the first time we see how the Bishop himself struggles in trying to do good for others.

The Bishop had been shocked to see the guillotine. The narrator goes on to show how no one can remain indifferent to the death penalty after gazing upon the scaffold—one must decide for or against it, and it doesn't permit remaining neutral. In the days after the execution, the Bishop seems crushed and tortured. One evening his sister overhears him muttering that it is wrong to care only about divine rather than human law: men have no right to touch what is God's alone.

This is a famous passage from Hugo, who was outspokenly against the death penalty in France. The excruciatingly detailed description of the scaffold immerses the reader in this world and challenges us to make a choice on the issue. Meanwhile the text also shows the Bishop struggling with worldly affairs.

Myriel is often summoned to the bedsides of those who are dying, and counsels them to remain strong and hopeful for the world to come.

Just as the Bishop accompanies people through their struggles in life, he continues this until their death.

Chapter 5 Myriel leads a monastic life, sleeping little and saying mass every morning. He is very busy, but always spends his free time caring for the sick or reading, writing, and gardening. He often walks alone, deep in thought, but every so often stops to speak to children and their mothers. To make his cassocks last longer, he always goes around in a thick purple cloak. He eats a frugal supper with his two female companions, only splurging when he has guests. At night he writes, finishing several manuscripts on biblical exegesis before the end of his life, some of which are covered with notes of praise to God scrawled in the margins.

The narrator makes a largely complete catalogue of how the Bishop spends his days—perhaps showing how even a saintly man can lead a relatively normal life, and that it's not necessary to be extraordinary in order to be good. Hugo also shows how the Bishop's faith in God is directly tied to his good works, even as the Bishop dismisses the worldly benefits and opportunities that are normally bestowed upon the Catholic clergy.

Chapter 6 The Bishop sleeps on the second floor of his house, and the oratory is in the attic. It can only be reached through his bedroom, but he uses it at times to host guests. There is a stable in the backyard garden, holding two cows, and the Bishop always gives at least half their milk to the hospital. In his oratory, he has constructed an altar out of a sideboard with cheap materials. Every time the women of D---- raise money for a new altar, he takes it and gives it to the poor. Mademoiselle Baptistine would have loved to buy a set of velvet drawing-room furniture, but 500 francs is far above their budget.

Again, in any and all aspects of the Bishop's daily life, he attempts to devote much of what he has to others. The women in D---, for instance, are not portrayed as selfish or wrong, but the fact that the Bishop goes against their desires is another piece of evidence for his radical inversion of norms and values. Mademoiselle Baptistine shows that this lifestyle isn't always easy, but also that the things she'd like to have are ultimately unimportant.

The Bishop's bedchamber is simple and decorated only with crosses and two portraits of abbés. The only luxury the Bishop allows is for the house to remain sparklingly clean. However, he still retains six silver knives, forks, and a soup ladle, as well as two **silver candlesticks** from his former life, and admits it would be hard for him to renounce them. Madame Magloire keeps them in a small locked cupboard, though she never removes the key.

The silver candlesticks will become an important symbol in the novel, but for now, simply focus on their relationship to the Bishop's journey from sin (though we don't know too much about this) to redemption and goodness. They're a reminder of how far he's come, but also how difficult it is to give up coveting nice things.

In the garden, Madame Magloire grows vegetables while the Bishop grows flowers. Madame Magloire once remarked at the uselessness of growing flowers rather than food, to which the Bishop responded that what is beautiful is also useful.

The Bishop is not entirely ascetic: his emphasis on beauty over usefulness is part of his broader work against utilitarian and instrumental thinking.

The house has no doors that could be locked, and the Bishop keeps them open day and night: he believes the door of the physician and of the priest should always be open. One day another priest asked if he was ever afraid of anyone who might enter, and the Bishop said to him in Latin that "anyone but the Lord guards his house in vain."

The Bishop's unlocked doors represent the ease of access to truth and goodness that he hopes to promote among the people. They're also another way he tries to break down barriers between those in power and the regular populace.

Chapter 7 The narrator tells the story of one incident to explain the Bishop's nature. An ex-lieutenant and now bandit, Cravatte, escaped and made his way through many small villages of France, where his highway robberies and sacking of cathedrals made the news. The Bishop was doing his rounds in the area where Cravatte was hiding around this time. The Bishop claimed he would go without an escort, and that he couldn't forsake one of his beloved mountain communities. He went alone, and arrived at a shepherd's village, where he stayed for a month. At the end of his stay, the villagers were embarrassed not to have the correct ornaments for him to say a certain prayer, at which point two unknown horseman brought a large chest to him. It contained gold ornaments, cloths, and crosses—all stolen from a cathedral—and a note saying "From Cravatte to Monseigneur Bienvenu." The Bishop smiled and said it must have come from God. That evening, before going to bed, he said that we should not fear robbers or murderers from without, but instead prejudice and vice from within.

Cravatte is an emblematic example of the kind of person that is usually considered to be evil, wrong, and sinful. First of all, the Bishop's lack of fear recalls his willingness to leave his doors open. Closed doors imply both a lack of understanding and an inability to access truth and goodness. This story is also notable in that it shows the Bishop's lack of surprise or confusion when faced with unexpected events. Cravatte most likely meant the chest as a provocation to the Bishop, but instead of being provoked, the Bishop simply accepts the chest as a gift to him and the villagers—paradoxically putting him back in a position of power. His conclusion underlines how greater evil can be done through thought and judgment rather than just external action.

Chapter 8 One day, a senator comes to D--- to dine with Myriel and the prefect. The senator declares that he wants to explain his philosophy—he laughs at infinite and eternal things and believes himself a product of Epicurus. He begins a monologue comparing Diderot to Voltaire, and expressing skepticism about Jesus' preaching renunciation and sacrifice. He says people should simply live merrily rather than worry about life after death, since there is no such thing as good and evil. He laughs at the idea of paradise and God, saying that he's only a piece of dust collected on earth for a time, and whatever he does will lead to nothingness, so he might as well enjoy himself.

The senator expounds on a number of elements of materialist and atheist philosophy, in a caricatured portrayal of some major thinkers from these fields. It's not the ideas as much as the tone that Hugo clearly disapproves of. The senator is portrayed as smug and overly confident, unwilling to see the other side and eager to expose his views for the sake of controversy, rather than in the interest of discussing and arguing about them.

The Bishop claps his hands and says this materialism is marvelous, allowing anyone who promotes it to consider himself not responsible for anything. He says it's an agreeable philosophy, exquisite, refined, and perfect for the rich alone. But he says the rich shouldn't begrudge the common people their belief in God, as "goose stuffed with chestnuts is the truffled turkey of the poor."

Again, the Bishop refuses to grow angry or lose his temper when confronted with such provocations. Instead, he gains the upper hand again, especially in skirting the question so that he can once again return to his major concern: the impact of belief on the poor.


Chapter 9 To better understand the Bishop, the narrator transcribes a letter from Mademoiselle Baptistine to her childhood friend, in which she discusses how good and generous her brother is, though while complaining a bit about her own privations. She writes that she used to worry about how he exposed himself to such dangers, but is now getting used to it. She has learned how to manage him as a man with "grandeur of soul."

Mademoiselle Baptistine wouldn't dare to challenge the Bishop. But as this letter shows, it's taken even her a while—recall the description of her at the beginning as good and filled with light—to "understand" the Bishop, that is, to understand the radically new system of values that he's promoting.

Chapter 10 An even more dangerous act of the Bishop is the subject of this chapter. A member of the French Convention, "G---," who hadn't voted for the king's death but was still considered a "quasi-regicide" (now, twenty years later, France is again a monarchy), lives far away from the city in the countryside. He is loathed in the town, and people are pleased when a rumor spreads that G--- is now dying and won't live to see dawn. The Bishop immediately sets out to the small, poor hut where he sees a white-haired man next to his servant, a shepherd boy. The Bishop introduces himself, and the old man recognizes him and says he expects to die in around three hours.

The Convention was the assembly during the French Revolution that sentenced Louis XVI to death and eventually guillotined him and his wife. At the time of the book's action, especially in the countryside, French people consider "conventionnaires" absolutely evil. Once again, the Bishop challenges this judgment by going to visit this so-called evil man himself, and offering to stay by his side until the man dies.


The Bishop, despite his modesty, is a little shocked not to be addressed as Monseigneur by G---, and feels a bit severe, while G--- watches him cordially and humbly. The Bishop thinks he looks strong, as if he's welcoming death on purpose and freely. He sits down and congratulates the old man for not voting for the death of the king. The man stops smiling and says he did vote for the death of the tyrant—that is, for the death of ignorance. Man should only be governed by science, he says. When the Bishop adds, "and conscience," G--- says that conscience is the innate science we have within us.

Even the Bishop is unable to entirely dismiss the social norms and expectations associated with his position. G--- immediately situates himself within the Enlightenment strain of thought that had long pushed for the end of monarchies, in the hope that reason would triumph. The Bishop suggests that there are other values just as important, if not more so, than reason.

G--- begins to speak of his desire for the end of slavery and evil, which he promoted by voting for the Republic. He admits that they destroyed the old regime in deeds but not entirely in ideas—but he claims that the French Revolution was the consecration of humanity, even despite '93—that is, the Terror. Each time the Bishop introduces a counterpoint—for instance, the murder of the child Louis XVII with his father—the man rejoins with a counterexample, such as the child who was the brother of a revolutionary and also hanged. He says that he weeps more over the children of the people, who suffered for centuries before the Revolution, than the children of the monarchy. The Bishop, G--- says, is probably one of those churchmen who revel in a large income and all the material enjoyments of life. The Bishop hangs his head and says he is only a worm, but asks what all those riches could prove about the horrors of 1793.

Throughout this exchange, the Bishop doesn't grow angry or hostile, but neither does G---: the Bishop has perhaps met his match. Throughout the conversation, the narrator doesn't caricature one side or show bias towards the other. Instead, the opinions of both men are laid out in a straightforward fashion. What is unmistakable is the long history of misery in France. The Bishop and G--- just take different sides concerning the causes and correct remedies for such misery. Still, the reader does know more than G---, who is unaware of the Bishop's modesty and generosity and so judges him as another greedy, wealthy member of the clergy.

G--- begins to compare a series of names, some of whom are revolutionaries turned evil, but others of whom are tyrants of the monarchy—making the point that there was good and evil in both parties. He says that even from the most terrible blows, the revolution found a way to support progress and bring the human race forward. The brutalities of progress are called revolution, he says. The Bishop says that progress should believe in God and follow him. Suddenly, the old man begins to tremble and weep, finally pointing a finger heavenward and saying that he believes in the infinite. He closes his eyes, and then slowly opens them. G--- tells the Bishop that he spent his life in study and contemplation, following his country when he was asked to. He tried to combat abuses and destroy tyrannies, tearing up the cloth from the altar only to care for his country. He's always upheld the human race's march forward. After he did his best in all this, he was hunted down, persecuted, scorned, and cursed. He has accepted this isolation, and now, at 86 years old, he asks the Bishop what he has come to ask of him. The Bishop says, "Your blessing," and bends down. When he stands up again G--- has died. From then on the Bishop seems to be more thoughtful, sinking into silence whenever G--- is mentioned.

Even G--- acknowledges that the revolution was not perfect, and that evils were done on both sides. But he still believes that revolution is good and necessary in order to achieve progress. The Bishop, in turn, doesn't deny the need for progress, but questions the extent to which revolution can achieve it, or whether what a revolution can achieve is worth it. It's difficult to know how to interpret G---'s pause and pointing to the sky—even the Bishop seems willing to accept this as a unknown factor. The Bishop ultimately chooses not to engage with G--- in his final, emotional speech, perhaps because this is a dying man, but also perhaps because the Bishop acknowledges much of what G--- has said to be true. This conversation only strengthens the Bishop's desire to work against dogma, combat easy answers, and refuse judgment.

Chapter 11 The narrator cautions that Monseigneur Welcome is not a "philosophical Bishop"—rather, the encounter with the Convention man (G---) astonished him and only made him more gentle. To understand the Bishop's attitude towards political events in France, the narrator takes us back to the 1811 assembly of French and Italian bishops, following the 1809 arrest of the Pope. The Bishop was not exactly at home in this group, and he remarks on the luxury of his colleagues while there are still poor people in the world. The Bishop believes that the priest's first proof of charity is poverty. Nevertheless, he is not one to enter into contemporary theological quarrels, and is generally disapproving of Napoleon. He has two sergeant brothers whom he writes to regularly, though one had not done his best in pursuing the escaping Emperor Napoleon. The Bishop disapproved of this.

In the conversations with G---and with the senator, both men brought up some major philosophical issues, to which the Bishop largely responded with appeals to conscience, generosity, and the poor. Indeed, we see here that the Bishop isn't exactly an intellectual—in fact, he doesn't feel at home among them. Thus the narrator makes a claim against intellectualism and for simplicity in order to be a good, moral person. Even a priest, we're asked to believe, doesn't need to be a philosophical theologian in order to do good works.

The narrator remarks that one can easily admire the Bishop's protest against Napoleon in the name of liberty while Napoleon was all-powerful, though the same protest becomes less justifiable against a weak, powerless Napoleon. It can be a crime to applaud and to condemn the same man, depending on the time and place.

Here, for the first time, the narrator distinguishes his own beliefs from those of the Bishop. The Bishop condemns Napoleon, while the narrator has an even a more nuanced, less judgmental attitude towards him (using the Bishop's own method).

The Bishop is tolerant overall, however. There was a porter of the town-hall placed by the Emperor, who, after Napoleon's fall, refused to wear royal markers and would scoff aloud at Louis XVII. Finally, he was fired and his family grew hungry, so the Bishop appointed him usher in the cathedral.

Whatever the Bishop's political views, ultimately he considers people as valuable human beings regardless of what they may believe, as is revealed by this example.

Chapter 12 The narrator notes that most bishops have a whole parade of officials and servants around them, a pulsing group that can support the high ambitions of any priest. Bienvenu has no such gang of young priests around him, and lacks any ambition for success. He is thus very isolated. The narrator notes that the philosophy of success has won out in society, so that you can win in the lottery or be born with a silver spoon and be considered clever and of great merit. People claw to success based on luck, accident, greed, or sin, and are considered men of genius.

The Bishop is contrasted to other members of the clergy, who are not exempt from the jockeying for position that characterizes so many other aspects of social life. This also allows the narrator to promote a socially liberal philosophy—in which people are responsible for each other—over a philosophy of individual hard work and success, which he considers to be a myth.

Chapter 13 The narrator cannot tell exactly what the Bishop thinks of certain dogmas or mysteries, because more important than theology to him is love and good works. The Bishop rarely grows angry or indignant. As a young man, he had been passionate and violent, but he changed because of a growing conviction in the right way to live. In 1815 he turns 75, though he seems younger.

Again, the narrator repeats the distinction between theological preeminence and goodness in works and action. This is revealed not only in how the Bishop acts towards others, but also in how he carries himself—something that, we learn, can be changed over the course of someone's life.

When the Bishop speaks he seems joyful and at ease, but when he is alone and in thought he grows serious and calm. His days pass in a flurry of study, work, and charity, though he always spends time in the garden before bed. He thinks about the great mysteries of eternity and infinity as he works, and then sits on a garden bench: this is all he needs to adore God.

The narrator returns to the daily details of the Bishop's life, emphasizing once again that he is able to pause over beauty. Enjoyment of minor, simple aspects of life seems to be an important part of the Bishop's overall goodness.

Chapter 14 The Bishop refrains from thinking too hard about the insoluble problems of life and the universe. He is not a genius, but instead is content to adore God and follow the Gospels. He sees sickness and suffering everywhere but is drawn towards it, feeling tenderness and pity and continuing to profess love. He leaves to the side the terrifying questions to which there are no human answers. He takes note of the exterior of these questions, and respects them, but they are not a central part of his life or thought.

By stressing the fact that the Bishop is not an intellectual, the narrator makes a case for simplicity and goodness rather than flashy, impressive diction or great fame. His faith, the narrator suggests, is made stronger rather than weaker in turning away from theological mysteries and toward daily misery. This is also, of course, what Hugo's book sets out to do.

VOLUME 1, BOOK 2: THE FALL

Chapter 1 In early October, 1815, a man travelling on foot enters D----, and the inhabitants stare out their windows at him uneasily because of how wretched he looks (though he's strong and robust, a little younger than 50 years old). He carries only a soldier's knapsack, wears a long beard, and is dusty all over. No one knows where he came from. He looks like he's been walking all day, and seems exhausted. He walks past the town hall, where he salutes the gendarme stationed outside. The gendarme watches him pass and then enters the town hall himself.

This, our first impression of the protagonist of Les Misérables, *is a bit anticlimactic: he enters the scene as a nameless, wretched figure slowly making his way into the town. This introduction is important, however, as Hugo wants us to keep in mind that anyone can become wretched, and that you never know what kind of person is dressed in rags, and for what reason.*

The man continues to an inn owned by the wealthy Jacquin Labarre, whose partner hotel in Grenoble was well-known and acclaimed. The man asks for food and lodging, and says he has money to pay for it. As he is warming himself by the fire, Jacquin Labarre scribbles a note and sends a servant child off to the town hall with it. The child returns with a reply, and Jacquin stands up and tells the man he cannot serve him. The man protests, and after a back-and-forth, Jacquin says that the man is Jean Valjean, and that he had suspected something upon his arrival. "Go away!" he says. Jean Valjean, head down, walks down the street, with all the passersby behind him looking on with fascination and disgust.

Initially, Jean Valjean seems to be met with cordial warmth and hospitality in his visit to D---. However, it soon becomes clear that this hospitality is contingent on the visitor conforming to certain social expectations. An ex-convict isn't in prison anymore, but he may as well be, it seems. He's now an object of a kind of schadenfreude *(rejoicing in another's suffering) on the part of the villagers, and is refused shelter, as well as any warmth or emotional support.*

Jean Valjean approaches a public house, where men are drinking. He's initially welcomed in to the fire, but one of the men at the table is a fishmonger who had been at Labarre's inn earlier. He makes a sign to the tavern-keeper and they exchange a few words. Then the tavern-keeper lays his hand on Jean Valjean's shoulder and tells him to leave. Valjean knocks at the prison door, but is told he must leave unless he gets himself arrested.

Jean Valjean's second attempt is similarly thwarted. He goes back out from the fire into the cold, moving from light into darkness in a shift that will be contrasted by the upward journey that Hugo wants to show. Even the prison isn't open to Valjean now—he's in a position of the greatest vulnerability, or darkness.

At one little street, he peers through the bright-lit pane of a single-story house, and sees a merry-looking man dancing a child on his knees, while a young woman next to him is nursing another child. Jean Valjean pauses, perhaps hoping he'll find some pity here. He knocks and asks if he could pay for a bit of food and lodging. The peasant says he wouldn't refuse, but asks why he hasn't been to either the inn or Labarre's. Suddenly, he asks if he's the man—and the woman rises and cowers with her children behind her husband. He tells Valjean to clear out and violently closes the door.

Again, light and darkness make a powerful contrast here, where light stands for happiness, family life, and safety. But all of these, while they seem so physically close, remain unattainable and inaccessible for Valjean. In fact, for these people Valjean seems to threaten the cozy, stable, safe family life that they've created, as the wife cowers behind her husband.

As night falls, Valjean catches sight of a hut in one of the gardens bordering the street. He climbs over the fence and finds a bed of straw within the hut, but then hears a growl and realizes it is a dog's kennel. He turns back into the street and continues, his head drooping, towards a black horizon framed by a whitish arc of clouds atop the sky, which creates a gloomy, foreboding, effect. He passes through the Cathedral Square and shakes his fist at the church.

Even the dog in his kennel turns Valjean back out onto the street. As often happens in Hugo's writing, the physical environment symbolizes and strengthens the mental and emotional state of the characters. The cloudy, gloomy atmosphere reflects the state of Valjean's soul.

As Valjean rests at a street corner, an old woman comes out of the church. She asks what he's doing, and he answers angrily that he's sleeping. He says he has been a soldier, and in response to her question, he says he can't go to the inn since he has no money. The woman gives him the four sous in her pocket, and, pointing to a small, low house down the street, asks if he's knocked at that door. It's the Bishop's home.

By the time of this exchange, Valjean no longer has any hope that anyone will show him mercy or kindness, so he's rude in turn to the woman. Finally there seems to be a possibility that he'll be shown better treatment, but given Hugo's emphasis on paradox, this life-saving shelter appears as a small, shabby house.

Chapter 2 That evening, the Bishop of D--- is working on a manuscript about religious and personal duty. Meanwhile, Madame Magloire and Mademoiselle Baptistine prepare the table for dinner. Madame Magloire is small, plump, and looks more like a peasant, whereas Mademoiselle Baptistine is regal-looking, gentler, and calmer. Madame Magloire has heard rumors about a suspicious vagabond wandering about the town. As the Bishop comes into the room for dinner, she begins the entire story over again, saying that there will surely be some kind of catastrophe in town tonight. At the moment she is saying that they need to start locking their doors, they hear a loud knock. The Bishop says, "Come in."

This brief sketch reminds us of the characters of Madame Magloire, who here stands for the town's beliefs and prejudices, and the Bishop, who listens to her with a benign but firm perspective, refusing to align himself with the preconceived judgments that other townspeople are all too willing to indulge in. Hugo is adept at the cliffhanger, although his process of making two distinct narratives converge takes away some of the surprise factor for the reader—if that's what he was aiming for at all.

Chapter 3 Jean Valjean enters, lit up by the fire on the hearth and frightening the two women. He declares that he is a convict who has spent the past 19 years in the galleys. He's been walking for four days on the way to Pontarlier. He's been turned out everywhere because of his yellow passport. He details how he's been treated and then says he has money and is very hungry: he asks if he may stay. The Bishop immediately tells Madame Magloire to set another place. The man advances and repeats that he's a convict, showing his yellow passport, and saying he had been imprisoned 5 years for burglary and 14 for multiple attempted escapes. He is a dangerous man, he says, but the Bishop merely tells Madame Magloire to make the bed in the alcove, and he tells Valjean to warm himself by the fire.

Here light takes on a malevolent aspect, allowing the two women in the household to "see" Valjean clearly—though this instance of light perhaps only prefigures, for Hugo, Valjean's future transformation. Valjean's attitude has become hopeless, and almost combatively so. He has grown convinced of the antagonism of everyone who approaches him, and the idea of mercy, or even refraining from judgment, is alien to him. That he repeats that he's dangerous, and a criminal, only underlines how hopeless he himself sees his case to be.

Jean Valjean's face is filled with doubt and joy. He stammers that he hasn't slept in a bed in 19 years, and he was sure he'd be expelled. The Bishop says he won't charge him anything, but asks how much he's made in 19 years: at the answer, 119 francs, 15 sous, he sighs. Jean Valjean says he once saw a bishop in the galleys, but he said Mass far off, and it was difficult to hear or understand. He says the Bishop doesn't despise him, though he didn't conceal who he was. The Bishop says this isn't his house, but that of Jesus Christ, and that anyone who suffers is welcome.

Valjean's previous experience with people of the clergy makes a stark contrast to what the Bishop has tried to do in establishing a close, horizontal, compassionate relationship with people rather than speaking to them from on high. The Bishop clearly thinks that the greater injustice is not Valjean's initial crime, but the fact that he has been given such a small amount for 19 years of labor.

The Bishop tells Jean Valjean that he is deserving of pity, and that God rejoices at a repentant sinner. As they sit down to dinner, the Bishop notes that something is missing—Madame Magloire hadn't laid out the whole six sets of silver, as was usual for them when they had guests. She immediately does so.

Madame Magloire may not explicitly contradict the Bishop's wishes, but she is far more wary than the Bishop is of welcoming a known thief into her home. The Bishop thinks there's no reason not to use their nicest silverware.

Chapter 4 The narrator transcribes a passage from one of Mademoiselle Baptistine's letters to explain what happened at the table. Jean Valjean says that this is too good for him, but notes that others who refused to host him would eat better than the Bishop. Valjean cannot see how his host could be a bishop. The Bishop merely tells him that Pontarlier, Valjean's destination, is good country. The Bishop had found work there when his family was ruined during the Revolution. He describes the cheese-dairies of the place, while Valjean seems to perk up as he eats. The Bishop is careful not to mention anything that might remind Valjean of his past.

From his initial taciturn and gloomy air, Valjean now becomes more talkative and cheery, even as he contrasts the Bishop's relatively simple household to others in the town. Rather than explaining himself, the Bishop merely does all he can to make Valjean feel at home, talking about the future rather than the past, and making comparisons to his own personal history and the way he started out.

Chapter 5 The Bishop leads Valjean into the alcove, crossing through his bedroom first, as the house's layout makes necessary. After thanking him, Valjean suddenly exclaims at how the Bishop isn't afraid to lodge him in his house, and he laughs horribly. The Bishop says it's the concern of God. He blesses Valjean and descends to the garden, walking and meditating on mysteries.

Once again, Valjean falls back into the self-loathing that had characterized his initial outbursts against the Bishop, telling him why he shouldn't offer Valjean a shelter. This moment recalls the Bishop's attitude towards Cravatte: he believed internal sin was far more dangerous than external.

Chapter 6 Jean Valjean awakens in the middle of the night. He is originally from a poor peasant family in Brie. His parents had died when he was young, and he was brought up by an older sister, who had seven children before her husband died. Valjean then spent his life working to support his sister and her children, often going without food so that the children could eat. He worked as a laborer, but one particularly difficult winter he was without work and even bread. One Sunday evening in 1795, Valjean broke the window of a bakery and ran off with a loaf of bread. He was pronounced guilty at trial and condemned to five years in the galleys. He wept as he was led off to Toulon with a chain around his neck.

Here the narrator fills in some of Jean Valjean's past. We learn that he was not an evil individual from birth, but rather suffered through great misery, not even based on his own choices, and was forced from an early age to take on the burden of others as well. The narrator portrays Valjean's history sympathetically, showing how material desperation can lead to crime, and how the legal punishment can then seem far more criminal than the initial crime itself.

In Toulon, Jean Valjean became only "number 24,601," and no one troubled himself about his sister or the children. Even Valjean gradually forgot them. In his fourth year of captivity, he heard a rumor that someone had seen his sister in Paris with only her youngest child with her. She was a folder and stitcher at a printing office working long hours, and since the child wasn't allowed in, he had to stand in the cold winter air in the school courtyard for an hour each day, unless an old porter took pity on him and allowed him to catch some sleep in her den. Valjean never again heard anything about his family.

Being identified as a number rather than as a name is a significant deprivation of dignity. In the galleys, one's own name, identity, family, and past are no longer considered valuable or even necessary. The narrator also shows how Valjean's conviction led to even greater suffering on the part of his family, particularly his sister's child. The suffering of children will be a recurring motif in the book, representing the peak of injustice.

Near the end of the fourth year, Jean Valjean's comrades helped him escape. He wandered for two days before being captured. He escaped three more times, and had years added to his sentence each time. He was finally released in October 1815 after 19 years—just for stealing a loaf of bread. He had entered sobbing, and emerged gloomy and impassive.

Valjean's desperation leads him to take ever more risky and dangerous steps, which exacerbate rather than resolve his situation. The narrator shows how prison, far from reforming people, actually only hardens them into true criminals.

Chapter 7 The narrator states that it's important to look into Valjean's soul, since society creates such men. He was not perfect, but withdrew into himself and put himself on trial. He recognized that he was not innocent, and should not have stolen, but he also asked himself whether the law hadn't been abused in the severity of his judgment. He wondered how society could have the right to keep the poor forever between not enough work and too much punishment. Ultimately, he condemned society and began to hate it. Human society had only harmed him, and he had come to believe that life is war and full of hate. He attended the school in the galleys, believing that he could strengthen his hate through intelligence. Thus the more he learned, the darker his soul became.

The narrator takes us through Valjean's own moral questioning, showing again how prison can transform someone from an imperfect but average person into someone with a hardened heart. The questions Valjean poses to himself are initially hesitant—he is willing, at first, to accept some blame for the situation—but over time, and largely due to his punishment, he loses this sense of balance and fairness and turns against society entirely. Now society is not something to be reformed but rather something to be fought against.

But the narrator stresses that Valjean was not evil, and asks if man, created good by God, can be turned wicked by man. Some might, in studying Valjean, do away with all hope that his soul might be good deep down. The narrator notes that Valjean himself had little idea of how he arrived at a point of such darkness. His multiple attempts at escape were impetuous, not based on reason.

The narrator again returns to one of the book's major moral questions: what it means to be good or evil, and if this can be changed. It also asks how people arrive at such a point, and who might be to blame for this journey from light to darkness, as it were.

Jean Valjean had enormous physical strength, the strength of four men, and became notorious for this, as well as for his ability to climb vertical surfaces. He grew glum and quiet in prison, vaguely aware that there was such a thing as civilization, a distant splendor that only made his own life blacker. In general, through his time in the galleys, he became slowly capable of evil action, both instinctive and premeditated—a very dangerous man. Upon his release he had not cried for nineteen years.

Valjean's physical strength will be crucial later in the book, but for now, we can note how the galleys taught him to use this quality for evil rather than for good. Valjean's lack of tears represents the gradual hardening of his soul against moral improvement or goodness—both qualities that, ironically, he had shown before entering the galleys.

Chapter 8 The narrator compares Valjean to a man fallen overboard, sinking and rising again to the surface, his shouts and suffering going unheeded. He feels he is being pulled into the abyss, but continues to struggle and swim, his strength slowly ebbing. God and men seem to be nowhere, and he is paralyzed by the cold of the sea. The sea is the "social night" created by unfair justice. The sea is full wretchedness.

Again, the narrator points to night and darkness as emblematic of emotional and mental turmoil, and the temptation of evil. This evocative simile shows Valjean to be a man who's not entirely consistent with himself but rather someone who struggles internally with who he is.

Chapter 9 Jean Valjean had been overwhelmed by the idea of liberty, but soon realized that a convict's yellow passport is no guarantee of true liberty, and he felt deeply bitter. The 171 francs he had calculated that he had earned in the galleys were reduced for taxes and days off to 109, and he felt robbed. He attempted to join various labor teams, but was denied each time once he handed over his yellow passport.

The narrator paints a disapproving picture of the ex-convict's place in society. Rather than reforming people, as prisons are supposedly meant to do, they trap convicts into a system from which they cannot emerge, as they are never able to redeem themselves for their crimes even after they are released.

Chapter 10 We return to the Bishop's house, where Jean Valjean is awakened by his overly comfortable bed—he isn't used to it. He feels troubled, and his thoughts continually return to the six sets of silver forks and spoons placed on the table. They haunt him, and he knows they're worth double what he made in nineteen years in the galleys. After remaining still and thoughtful, he suddenly sits up and puts his shoes on. After a few more moments, he takes them off again. Then the clock strikes half past three. He rises again, listens for any noise, and then grabs his knapsack and slips downstairs, through the Bishop's open door.

After a long flashback in which the narrator explains how Valjean has arrived at this moment, we return to a scene in which Valjean's conscience is once again tormented and split against itself. Because of the narrator's earlier explanations, we're meant to sympathize with Valjean's torments rather than condemn him for being tempted to betray the Bishop's generosity.

Chapter 11 Valjean slowly pushes open the door, shuddering at the noise of the hinge. His blood pumping, he imagines the household descending on him. But all is silent, and he slips into the Bishop's bedroom. The Bishop's face is **illuminated** and seems satisfied, hopeful, and content—almost divine. These emotions terrify Valjean and his uneasy conscience. He is vaguely aware of something sublime about the Bishop's face, and he seems torn. But after a few moments, taking off and then replacing his cap, Valjean steps rapidly past the bed, opens the cupboard, seizes the silverware basket, and returns to the oratory. He opens the window and jumps into the garden, then leaps over the wall and flees.

We don't know what is illuminating the Bishop's face, but this light underlines once again his goodness and clear conscience. Rather than being healed by such illumination, Valjean finds it excruciatingly painful, just as a sudden light shone into the darkness can cause pain and blindness. Valjean continues to struggle internally with what to do, but the social and moral system he learned in the galleys wins out, so that he leaves like a thief and not through the front door.

Chapter 12 The next morning, Madame Magloire rushes into the garden to inform the Bishop that the silverware has been stolen. The Bishop calmly tells her that he had been wrong to keep the silver for so long; it belonged to a poor man far more than to him. As he eats breakfast, a group of gendarmes arrive with Jean Valjean, who is hanging his head. But the Bishop asks why they've brought him back: he had given the silverware to Valjean as a gift. He tells the gendarmes to release Valjean, but before they do, he tells Valjean that he'd forgotten the **silver candlesticks**: the Bishop hands them to Valjean, who's trembling. Then he tells Valjean that he must never forget that he's promised to use this money to become an honest man. He's bought back his soul and now gives it to God, he says.

Madame Magloire seems to feel vindicated by the theft, as if it proved that she was right to judge and condemn Valjean. But the Bishop wants again turns this judgment on its head, condemning himself instead for his desire to keep the silverware rather than giving it to someone in greater need. Throughout this exchange, Valjean is physically overwhelmed: he trembles and gasps at the Bishop, whose mercy he simply cannot wrap his head around. Valjean never actually promised what the Bishop says he did—this is a way for the Bishop to ask Valjean to reform.

Chapter 13 Jean Valjean hurries out of town, feeling vaguely angry. He is simultaneously touched and humiliated. In the midst of his raging thoughts, he sees a small Savoyard (from Savoy) boy singing and walking along the path, playing with coins in his hand, including a 40-sou piece. He tosses up the coins and that piece rolls towards Valjean, who places his boot over it. The child, who says he's named Gervais, asks for his money. Valjean drops his head and remains silent, and Gervais grows increasingly distraught. Troubled, Jean Valjean doesn't respond to his pleas, until suddenly he yells at the boy to take off. The boy runs off, sobbing.

Valjean now finds himself in emotional turmoil. He's set himself against society, but now finds that a member of that society—a clergyman, no less—has saved him. However, Valjean still reflexively retains the criminal instincts and resourcefulness that he's learned over 19 years in the galleys. As he drops his head, this bodily memory jars with the new way of life he's just glimpsed (from the Bishop), but the former, reflexive reaction wins out this time.

The sun has just set, and Jean Valjean begins breathing irregularly. He steps forward mechanically and catches sight of the 40-sou piece shining on the ground. He asks himself what it is and recoils, finally seizing it and standing back up, shivering like a terrified wild animal. Valjean runs after the child and shouts out his name. The landscape is deserted and an icy wind is blowing. Valjean sees a priest on horseback, and asks if he's seen a small child. Valjean gives the priest several five-franc coins, saying it is for the poor, and then asks wildly again about Gervais before declaring that he's a thief and must be arrested. The priest merely sets off again in alarm.

Valjean looks at the money piece as if he doesn't know what it is or what he's done. This is another piece of evidence for the idea that his theft from little Gervais was no more than a knee-jerk reaction based on almost two decades of learning this certain kind of skill. It's through looking at the evidence itself that Valjean seems to be shaken out of his reverie and is suddenly able to understand what he's done.

After running off in Gervais' direction, Valjean wanders all night calling out to him, and finally breaks down and cries for the first time in 19 years. When he had first left the Bishop's house, he had hardened himself against the priest's words, perceiving indistinctly that the words were the greatest attack of his life, and if he yielded he would have to renounce the hatred that had defined him for so long. This possibility filled him with anxiety. He could not have said why he robbed Gervais, except that it was the part of him that remained an instinctual beast, while his intelligence was still struggling. Only afterward did he realize that he had just done something of which he was no longer capable.

Valjean's tears serve to represent the first step towards softening his heart and allowing himself to glimpse another kind of relationship between himself and society at large. If the Bishop had judged and condemned him, his own carefully cultivated judgment of society would not have changed, but now he's forced to come to terms with how he lives. The paradox of doing something of which he is no longer capable suggests Valjean's excruciating tension between intelligence and animal reaction.

Now Valjean sees himself properly, and he is horrified. He compares the vision of himself to that of the Bishop, and he himself seems to shrink and then vanish in the Bishop's magnificent **light**. As Valjean weeps, light enters into his soul, and he is able to examine his life that now seems to him horrible. No one knows where he goes after this, but the narrator confirms that someone did see him later that night kneeling in front of the Bishop's residence in prayer.

Earlier the Bishop's illumination had been almost painful for Valjean to see. Now it is excruciating in a different way, in that it contrasts so strongly against his own darkness. Still, the narrator's words suggest that Valjean can now access some of the Bishop's light, which allows him to "see" himself and his life more clearly.

VOLUME 1, BOOK 3: IN THE YEAR 1817

Chapter 1 The narrator mentions a number of historical details about the year 1817, which is the 22nd year of Louis XVIII's reign. These include the popularity of the singer Pellegrini, the executions of several major criminals, the subjects for the prizes at the French Academy, and the disappearance of all the marks of Napoleon's reign—like the "N" on the Louvre and his name on the list of important Institutes. Everyone has agreed that Louis XVIII has closed the time of revolution forever. After detailing all these elements of 1817, the narrator notes that history neglects all these particulars, and must do so. Such details are useful in understanding the "physiognomy" (internal character as seen through external features) of the years and of the century.

Throughout the book, the narrator will touch on—and even delve into in depth—aspects of French history with which the general public (or at least a French audience) would be already familiar. But here he has a different take on the interrelation of history and specific narratives. Thinking about history as a series of kings and battles and treaties neglects, he notes, the particular stories of people living at the time. It is these stories that make up what we think of as "history," and the novel is perhaps ideally suited to explore these narratives.

Chapter 2 In 1817 four young men arrive in Paris from various provincial cities to study. They are normal 20-year-olds, neither wise nor ignorant, good nor bad. Their names are Felix Tholomyes, Listolier, Fameuil, and Blancheville, and each takes a mistress: Fantine, Dahlia, Zephine, and Favourite, respectively. The latter three are older and more experienced, while Fantine "the Blonde" still holds the illusions of youth and love. Her feelings for Tholomyes are truer than those of the other girls. No one knows where she comes from or who her parents were. She had come to Paris at 15 to "seek her fortune." For Tholomyes, though, their relationship is only a tryst. He is rich and merry, an amateur scriptwriter and extremely ironic. One day he takes the other three men aside and says that they must find a way both to give the women a surprise, and fulfill their parents' wishes to return home. The result of their conversation is an invitation to the girls to spend the next Sunday with them.

The narrator jumps right into an example of the kind of "physiognomy" that he thinks offers a useful counterpoint to History writ large. In order to do so, it's important to choose characters that are not particularly exemplary. None of these men or women will make their way into the history textbooks, but they each have their own particularities, their own personalities, and their own distinct ways of viewing the world and their relationships within it. The contrast between Fantine's youthful romanticism and Tholomyes' carefree attitude thus takes on the dimensions of a tragedy simply because of how well and minutely their story is described by the author.

Chapter 3 The group spends the day in Saint-Cloud, to the west of Paris. They're all in a good mood, beaming with youth and beauty. Fantine in particular is splendid-looking, with rosy lips, thick blond hair, an easy laugh, and a dress less revealing than the others'. Fantine is also modest and innocent, trusting perhaps too much in Tholomyes.

Fantine is portrayed as an innocent girl from the country, for whom the mysteries of Paris have not yet been uncovered, and who considers everyone around her as guileless and well-meaning as herself.

Chapter 4 The other girls are open to the kisses of all the boys, but Fantine only has eyes for Tholomyes. After breakfast the party goes to see a newly arrived plant from India at the King's Square. They return through Issy, a national park, where Tholomyes makes up a song in Spanish. He sings it as he swings the girls on a rope between two trees. Only Fantine is too modest to join in. At times Favourite asks what the surprise is, and Tholomyes tells her to be patient.

The other women are more adept at love affairs—this probably isn't their first—and understand how such affairs work in Paris. The narrator paints a portrait of the scene that sets up the women against the men, though all seem cheerful and lighthearted, unconcerned with future responsibilities.

Chapter 5 Finally the party goes to Bombarda's public house, which looks out onto the quay and river. It's packed with a Sunday crowd, all shouting merrily. The Champs-Elysées and Place de la Concorde are filled with people promenading and some playing games on the grass. The Chief of Police, indeed, had recently advised the king that there is nothing to be feared from Parisians, who are amiable and calm. The narrator, though, notes that Parisians may be frivolous and lazy, but can easily be fired up to fight for a cause they believe in.

In nineteenth-century Paris, Sundays were the one day of rest for much of the working and middle classes, and the narrator's description helps us understand why the city had a reputation as the capital of leisure in Europe. However, the narrator also foreshadows greater tumult in the same streets that now hold lighthearted, carefree individuals.

Chapter 6 Favourite tells Blancheville that she adores him, and says that if he ceased to love her, she would throw him into the water or have him arrested. He leans back, smiling in pride. Dahlia asks Favourite under her breath if she really loves Blancheville. Favourite says that she detests him, and actually loves an artist who lives in the same house as she, but is very poor. She is sad and lonesome here, she says.

This anecdote helps Hugo show how ultimately disingenuous these couples' relationships are. They may be having a good time, but there's a lack of honesty and truth in these affairs—something that can be traced, once again, to economic misery and wretchedness.

Chapter 7 Tholomyes begins to pontificate on all sorts of topics, and the others make fun of him. He cautions the audience against pursuing their passions too much, and recommends moderation (according to his studies in medicine). He gives them a recipe for health—much exercise, little sleep, hard toil, and unappetizing food. Women, he says, are treacherous. Blancheville calls out that Tholomyes is drunk, and he agrees and keeps drinking. He tells the women that error is love, and he idolizes them all—he heaps compliments on each one of the four, saying of Fantine that she is a dreamer of youthful freshness, but that she does not see how he is all illusion.

Tholomyes' ironic speech is hilarious to the audience because he does exactly the opposite of what he's supposedly prescribing. He and the others are aware, as Fantine is not, just how much these affairs consist only of smoke and mirrors. Tholomyes cautions Fantine playfully, though perhaps also in earnest, not to put as much faith in him as she does—though his concern for her is not enough to explicitly disabuse her of her illusions.

As Tholomyes takes a breath, Blancheville begins to sing, and Tholomyes proposes a toast to merriness. He calls out to Fantine to embrace him, but makes a mistake and embraces Favourite instead.

Tholomyes' mistake is emblematic of his generally cavalier attitude towards women.

Chapter 8 Tholomyes, Fameuil, and Listolier start to discuss philosophy, though Tholomyes mainly spews nonsense. At one point, though, a horse dragging a heavy cart down the quay falls and the cart comes to a halt. Tholomyes sings out an ironic mourning song, as Fantine sighs, "Poor horse," and the others laugh at her. It's time for the surprise, Tholomyes says, and he tells the women to wait for them.

For Tholomyes and the others, misfortune suffered by unknown people is no more than another way for them to make merry and joke around. The narrator contrasts this attitude with Fantine's earnest show of compassion, which sets her apart from the other men and women.

Chapter 9 The four young women watch the young men disappear into the Champs-Elysées. They amuse themselves by watching the passers-by, the other women making fun of Fantine, who is awed by the simplest things. Then the waiter from dinner enters, saying he has a letter that the gentlemen had ordered him not to deliver to them for an hour. The letter says that this is the surprise: their parents desire their return, and they must leave. By the time the women read this, they'll be gone, back to duty and responsibility. They ask the ladies to mourn them quickly and then replace them.

Fantine is once again portrayed as a simple country girl beguiled by the sophistication and mysteries of Paris. Just as Tholomyes and his friends saw Paris as their own, if temporary, playground, it's now clearer than ever that they perceived the four women as no more than their playthings, to be dismissed when they grow bored or when the demands of real life beckon.

The other three women say that it's a funny farce, and quite the adventure. They burst out laughing, and while Fantine laughs too, she later weeps: Tholomyes was her first lover, and now she is pregnant with his child.

The other women have understood the men's intentions all along, but for Fantine, the unequal positions of men and women in such a situation are now both a shock and a catastrophe.

VOLUME 1, BOOK 4: TO CONFIDE IS SOMETIMES TO DELIVER INTO A PERSON'S POWER

Chapter 1 This section opens in Montfermeil, near Paris, at an inn kept by the Thenardier couple. Over the door is nailed a painting of a man carrying another on his back in front of a battle scene, with the inscription "At the Sign of Sergeant of Waterloo." In front of the store, a fore-carriage of a massive, misshapen truck used to transport wooden planks is sunken into the ground and rusting away. There's a rusted looped chain hanging from the truck, and on one evening in spring 1818 two small girls are playing and swinging in it. Their gaiety contrasts sharply with the foreboding dark truck above them. Their mother watches them carefully from a distance. Suddenly another woman carrying a baby and a carpet-bag approaches the mother to compliment her children. This woman's child is beautiful, though the mother looks stricken by poverty.

Though Hugo seems at times to be obsessed with small details, many of them—including this description of the Waterloo portrait—will turn out to be significant aspects of the plot later on. Notice the contrast set up between the light gaiety of the children and the dark, menacing truck. Their happiness is also juxtaposed against an atmosphere that seems hardly inviting for families or children. This woman and her children then create yet another contrast with another mother-child pair, this one inhabiting true poverty rather than merely a run-down neighborhood.

It is Fantine—still beautiful despite her wretchedness. In the months after Tholomyes had left, Fantine had lost her girl friends and struggled to survive with a child, herself barely knowing how to read and write. People gossiped around her, and finally she decided to return to her native town of M.-sur-M. to work, though it would be necessary to conceal her sin. She sold all she had. Meanwhile, Tholomyes was on his way to becoming a wealthy, severe provincial lawyer.

The narrator has omitted the months between Tholomyes' betrayal and now, which makes it all the more evident to what depths Fantine has fallen because of her one mistake as an overly trusting and compassionate woman in Parisian society—a mistake that men in this society clearly don't have to worry about.

Fantine had stopped before the vision of the two swinging girls and noticed how happy they seemed. The women begin to talk: Madame Thenardier, the other woman, is thin, angular, and masculine with a bit of a beard. Fantine says that her husband is dead and work in Paris had failed her, so she's come to find work here. She sends her daughter, Cosette (a nickname from Euphrasie, her given name), to play with the other girls. Madame Thenardier remarks that they seem like sisters, which gives Fantine the confidence to ask if she'll keep her daughter for six francs a month. From the inn, a man calls out that it will have to be seven, with six months paid out in advance. Fantine agrees, saying that she will soon return for her daughter.

Watching the two young Thenardier girls, Fantine is able to imagine a better future for her daughter, one free from the misery and judgment to which she is constantly subjected. Madame Thenardier initially seems nice enough, able to find common ground with Fantine through motherhood. But the voice of Thenardier, the husband, sets the stage for what we'll come to expect from this character, who's always attempting to wring a few extra bills out of someone and would rather cheat than work honestly.

After a night spent at the inn, Fantine leaves in the morning, weeping. Thenardier (the husband) congratulates his wife, saying that he lacked money to pay his debts, so this advance worked out well.

Just as in the relationship between Fantine and Tholomyes, here Fantine's sincere emotion jars against the casual, miserly perspective of Thenardier.

Chapter Two The Thenardiers, says the narrator, belong to the class of coarse but successful people, as well as others between "middle" and "inferior" classes, but with all the vices of both. Thenardier, the husband, has a particularly distrustful look about him. Madame Thenardier, for her part, loves reading tasteless romances, and named her children, Eponine and Azelma, after characters in them. However, the narrator notes that it is a result of the Revolution and ideals of equality that plebeians can now take on the names of great men.

Here the narrator doesn't refrain from some judgment of his own, in situating the Thenardiers at a quite specific place within the economic and social hierarchy. In every characteristic the couple is described as tasteless, petty, and of questionable morality. Madame's love of dime-novel romances suggests that she lacks a true understanding of love and compassion.

Chapter The Thenardiers promptly use all Fantine's money to pay off their debts, and then begin to consider Cosette as a charity case. After a year, Thenardier writes to demand 12 francs a month, assuring Fantine that the child is happy and well. While Madame loves her two children, she hates Cosette and is vicious towards her, and the two girls copy her. In town, people admire the Thenardiers for bringing up a poor child whom they believe was abandoned. Soon Thenardier realizes that the child is probably a bastard, and demands 15 francs a month.

The Thenardiers couldn't be different from the Bishop of D---, who is both genuinely compassionate and charitable, and takes care not to spread word about his good deeds around town. This couple benefits from social admiration as they wring ever more money out of Fantine, even taking advantage of her vulnerability as a single mother in order to extract a greater income.

At merely five years old, Cosette becomes the servant of the house and is made to clean the home and run all sorts of errands. She grows ugly because of misery, only retaining her beautiful eyes. The neighborhood calls her a "lark," though she never sings. She is a small, shivering creature who is always awake and about before anyone else.

Often in the novel beauty is linked to goodness and ugliness to moral strife. Here it's not Cosette's own character that's in question, but the ugliness that stems from the way she's treated by the Thenardiers.

VOLUME 1, BOOK 5: THE DESCENT

Chapter 1 Meanwhile, Fantine has returned to M.-sur-M., which, while she'd been away, had grown from wretched to prosperous. In 1815 a stranger had come to town and had been inspired to make certain substitutions in the manufacture of "black goods" or trinkets. This allowed prices of raw materials to go down and profits to go up. In three years, the inventor had become rich and had created wealth all around him. Little is known about his origins, but the day he arrived in town, there was a great fire in the town hall, and he had rushed into the flames to save two children, so no one had thought to ask for his passport. He is called Father Madeleine.

As usual in Hugo, sections often begin with strangers entering or leaving and fortuitous chance serving as a lynchpin to the plot. Hugo isn't necessarily against wealth—only greed, even if one is often accompanied by the other. Here economic prosperity is considered to be something positive, which in certain circumstances allows others to rise out of poverty and create a life of dignity for themselves, here due to one particularly prosperous individual.

Chapter 2 By the end of his second year, Madeleine builds a large factory that can employ many who are hungry and poor. He separates the workrooms by sex to promote good morals and tolerance. Now almost no one is desperately poor. He only asks that each person be honest. Madeleine has spent over a million francs on the town and its poor, though he keeps 630,000 in a bank. At first, people are skeptical, even though he regularly attends church. In 1919 he's appointed mayor by the king, but he refuses, and then also refuses a Legion of Honor. Then the gossips say that he must be ignorant, without education, or else ambitious, or else an adventurer. Nevertheless, he slowly gains the admiration of the town, and when he again refuses the mayoralty in 1820, everyone begs him to accept, which he finally does.

Just as many residents of D--- had refused to embrace the Bishop as a truly good man, inhabitants of this time are similarly skeptical of apparent goodness, assuming that there must be something self-serving in Madeleine's charity. His refusal of accolades helps ease the judgmental tendency of many residents. But pay attention to the narrator's comment that Madeleine stresses good morals and honesty among his workers: a little later on we'll see how even such apparently immaculate requirements can backfire in the complex morality of social life.

Chapter 3 Madeleine remains simple and largely in solitude, enjoying spending time alone reading. He's known to be extraordinarily strong. He always goes out on walks with pockets filled with money, and returns with nothing. He does know a number of useful country tricks, like how to exterminate growths from a field or make medicine from plants. He is often completing good actions discreetly, so no one knows. But people whisper that he has millions deposited at the Laffitte bank, though in reality it's the 630,000 already mentioned.

Once again the narrator attempts to create a kind of "physiognomy" of a character, taking apart his various characteristics in order to better understand how he ticks. Madeleine seems to be a mix of urbane, sophisticated businessman and strong country stalwart. This combination confuses and intrigues many of the inhabitants of the town.

Chapter 4 In 1820, M. Myriel, Bishop of D---, dies at age 82, having been blind for several years, though happily accompanied by his sister and servant. This kind of love, the narrator says, means he did not lack anything. The day after the announcement of his death, Madeleine begins to wear only mourning clothes. People conclude that he had some sort of relationship with the Bishop, but he says only that he was a servant in the family as a young boy. It's also noticed that every time Madeleine sees a young Savoyard boy wandering in the town, he asks for his name and gives him money.

The narrator begins to give the reader hints as to Madeleine's true identity. This won't be the last time that characters wear disguises and conceal their names and pasts—actions that recall the question of whether redemption is possible for characters in the novel. The Bishop's death also underlines the way he led his life. In Les Misérables, *characters often receive the deaths the narrator believes they deserve due to their life choices.*


Chapter 5 Slowly the townspeople lose their skepticism about Madeleine. One person, however, is instinctively against him—a policeman named Javert who watches him as though he knew him. Javert is tall, with a heavy cane and hat, and has the authoritative air of a policeman. He had been born in prison to a fortune-teller. He decided that society excludes only those who attack it and those who guard it, so he became a policeman. He has a flat nose, large jaw, and permanent frown between his eyes. He loves authority and hates rebellion, scorning all who had ever committed a legal wrong. He would have arrested his own father if necessary, and without remorse.

This is another instance of a "physiognomic" description of a character, in which physical traits and personality characteristics meld into a unified picture of a certain person's inner self. Though Javert has an obsession with authority, the narrator makes it clear that he is not too distant from the underworld of prison and poverty, given his own background—suggesting that obsessive authority and criminal rebellion may have something in common with each other.


Chapter 6 One morning Madeleine is passing through M.-sur-M. when an old man, Father Fauchelevent, falls beneath his cart, his horse having fallen. Fauchelevent had lost his business just as Madeleine's was growing, and thus he tried to hurt Madeleine at any chance he could. Now, the man is caught in the wheels, which rest on his chest. The only way to get it off is to lift up the vehicle. When someone tells Madeleine that it will take 15 minutes to fetch a jack-screw, he begins to name prices—10, 20 louis—for someone to lift the cart with his back. No one answers, and Javert, who has just arrived, say that it's not for lack of will but for lack of strength.

Chapter 6 sets up a scene of an ethical challenge for Madeleine, whose supposed enemy now finds himself in a place of vulnerability. For the others who begin to gather around the cart, the question is less one of moral integrity than of physical capacity. We recall how one of Madeleine's apparent qualities is great strength, and this helps to fill in the gaps as to why the narrator lingers over this particular event.

Javert says he only knew one man, a convict in the galleys, who was strong enough to lift such a thing. Madeleine turns pale, but at that moment Fauchelevent yells that he is being strangled. Madeleine smiles sadly, darts under the cart, and slowly lifts the cart, quickly joined by twenty others and saving Fauchelevent. In the joy that follows, Javert stands still, staring at Madeleine.

It should by now be clear to the reader that Madeleine is in fact Jean Valjean. The ethical quandary is even greater than it first appeared, in that Madeleine can only save one person by risking the exposure of his own carefully concealed identity.

Chapter 7 Madeleine takes Fauchelevent to the hospital. The next morning, Fauchelevent finds a 1,000-franc note, on which Madeleine has written that he's purchased his cart (broken) and horse (dead).

Madeleine's goodness extends to the aftermath of the accident, since Fauchelevent will remain wounded and is unable to be a very effective manual laborer.

Soon afterwards, Madeleine is appointed mayor, and Javert begins to avoid him as much as possible. Meanwhile, the tax collection begins to increase exponentially—the sign of a prosperous place. When Fantine returns, she's admitted to the women's workroom and begins to earn her living.

The narrator notes tax collection rates at various points, suggesting that adherence to the law is eased and facilitated when people don't have to worry about their every meal.

Chapter 8 The ability to earn her keep makes Fantine enormously happy, and she thinks only of Cosette and their future. She writes often, which leads the other women to gossip about her, as people are wont to do. Finally, a certain Madame Victurnien travels to Montfermeil to talk to the Thenardiers, having seen the address on Fantine's letters. She returns and tells everyone about Fantine's illegitimate child. Not long after, the workroom superintendent tells Fantine that she is no longer employed and asks her, in the mayor's name, to leave the neighborhood. But she's in debt for her rent and furniture, and doesn't dare visit the mayor herself. In addition, the Thenardiers have just increased their demands to 15 francs a month.

Fantine finally seems to have achieved a certain level of stability—redeeming herself for her past actions, and ensuring the wellbeing of her daughter. But as is often the case for characters throughout the book, Fantine continues to be haunted by her past. Madeleine had decreed strict morals in the workroom, but the harsh judgment of Madame Victurnien and of the superintendent means that this well-intentioned rule now backfires.

Chapter 9 Madeleine had heard nothing of this, for he relies wholly on the superintendent of the women's workroom. No one in the neighborhood will hire Fantine as a servant, and her furniture dealer says that if she leaves he'll have her arrested as a thief. She begins to sew soldiers' shirts, but barely makes anything, and begins to pay the Thenardiers irregularly. She learns to live on increasing privations, sleeping and eating little. Seeing her passing, Madame Victurnien sometimes congratulates herself on having put Fantine back "in her place." Fantine's small cough grows worse, and her only small joy is to comb her still-beautiful hair each morning.

Madeleine either forgets or would rather not believe in the judgmental character of so many others. Within his successful, prosperous town, Fantine is an anomaly, but the narrator's acute, detailed descriptions make it impossible to consider her as an insignificant casualty of this success instead of as a tragedy of great proportions. The narrator balances this with an acknowledgement of personal weaknesses and human idiosyncrasies, like Fantine's love of her hair.

Chapter 10 In winter, lack of light means that Fantine earns too little. She has her hair cut off for 10 francs to buy a petticoat to send to Cosette. The Thenardiers, who wanted money, are furious and give it to Eponine, while Cosette continues to shiver. Fantine grows bitter and begins to despise the mayor. She takes a lover who abuses her, and sinks lower and lower. One day the Thenardiers say that Cosette is ill with military fever, and they need 40 francs to pay the doctor so she won't die. Fantine laughs wildly, but as she crosses the town square, a tooth-puller approaches her and says he'll give her two gold napoleons for her two front teeth. After thinking hard and asking her sewing partner about military fever, she heads back out that night to have the two teeth pulled. Of course, Cosette's fever was all a ruse by the Thenardiers.

The one source of material pleasure for Fantine is now taken away, and though she grows happy at the thought of how Cosette will benefit from the earnings, she cannot know that her misery doesn't even help counteract her daughter's plight. Hugo shows how for the poor and vulnerable, a series of minor misfortunes and necessities can pile up. Fantine's desperation quickly grows wildly out of proportion to her and her daughter's true needs, but because of the Thenardiers' conniving schemes, she cannot know this.

Fantine works 17 hours a day for nearly nothing. She feels hunted, and finally, when Thenardier asks for 100 francs at once or else he'll throw Cosette out, she becomes a prostitute.

By tracing Fantine's path to prostitution in excruciating detail, Hugo again makes the case for sympathy on behalf of society's outcasts.

Chapter 11 The narrator says that Fantine's story is one of society purchasing a slave: prostitution pits man's disgrace against woman's grace and beauty. Fantine has become deaf and cold to feeling, resigned to her fate, though she doesn't realize there are always new depths to sink to.

Hugo was a man of his time, and this passage reads as pigeonholing men and women into separate spheres and norms, but his defense of women in desperate situations is also powerful.

Chapter 12 It's January 1823 and a man named M. Bamatabois is amusing himself by following Fantine up the street, making fun of her ugliness and heaping insults on her. Finally, he picks up a handful of snow and throws it into her bare shoulders. She yells and buries her nails in his face, swearing and cursing at him. Javert notices the scuffle, and takes Fantine away, as the dandy escapes.

The book's portrayal of the unequal fates of men and women continues in another example, as a woman is forced to deal with the consequences of something for which a man was at blame, while the man himself is able to escape without a blemish on his character.

Chapter 13 Upon arriving at the station, Fantine crouches down like a frightened dog. It's a rare occasion for Javert to seem troubled by the kind of judgment he should impose, but ultimately he tells the other policemen to bring the woman to jail for six months. She grows desperate and frantic, saying that she must send money for her daughter. She begs for his mercy, saying that she is not to blame. She begins spewing frantic phrases about the Thenardiers and her need to make money, finally growing silent and sobbing. Javert simply says that she will get six months, and that's the end of it.

Even Javert, who is always so singleminded in his pursuit of legal justice, wavers as he witnesses the obvious desperation and vulnerability of the woman he's arrested. However, his embrace of authority ultimately prevails, and once he does decide on a sentence that he believes to be fair and just, he is deaf to any emotional appeals or to contextual explanations about Fantine's situation.

As the soldiers drag Fantine back up, the mayor—having slipped in without anyone's notice—asks for a moment. Fantine laughs hysterically and spits in his face. Wiping it off, Madeleine tells Javert to set the woman free. Javert feels like he is going mad, and Fantine is similarly shocked and bewildered, spewing forth another diatribe about how the mayor was the one who unfairly dismissed her and forced her to become a bad woman. Suddenly, she seems to realize that she is free to go, and she stands up, no longer weeping, and puts her hand on the door latch. This stuns Javert protesting that it cannot be, since the woman has insulted a citizen. Madeleine explains that he had been in the square, and had seen what happened. Javert continues to insist that she serve six months, but Madeleine orders him to obey. Finally, after continued protests, Madeleine tells Javert to leave the room. Fantine feels a strange confusion, failing to understand how the mayor had saved her after she insulted him.

Fantine's action is a physical manifestation of her descent from an innocent, kindhearted country girl to a frantic and desperate woman. She's fixated on Madeleine as the source of her misfortunes, just as Jean Valjean—for good reasons as well—fixated on society as the root of his troubles and became hostile and bitter as a result. This scene, indeed, recalls in many ways the scene of the gendarmes returning to the Bishop's house with Valjean, bearing the silver candlesticks, and the Bishop's offer of mercy and forgiveness. Fantine is similarly bewildered. Javert's astonishment takes a different angle, as his own understanding of justice and injustice clashes with Madeleine's act of mercy.

Madeleine tells her he did not know that she had been dismissed. He says he will pay her debts and send for her child. If she is telling the truth, he says, she has never ceased to be virtuous. Fantine can only exclaim, "Oh!" and then she faints.

In this case, Madeleine's forgiveness and compassion towards Fantine is so great, and so unexpected, that her conscious mind literally fails to process it.

VOLUME 1, BOOK 6: JAVERT

Madeleine brings Fantine into the infirmary, and then goes out to make inquiries. When she awakens, he tells her he knows how much she's suffered. The same night, Javert writes to the Prefect of Police in Paris. Madeleine sends the 120 francs owed to the Thenardiers; he tells them to send the child immediately to M.-sur-M. Thenardier is dazzled: he says that someone rich must have gotten involved. He draws up a bill for over 500 francs, making up various expenses. Madeleine sends the money, and Thenardier exclaims that they shouldn't give up the child.

Madeleine had put his trust in others, like the work superintendent, but now finds that promoting a moral workforce raises knottier questions than he might have expected. Meanwhile, the Thenardiers continue to serve as a foil to Madeleine's kindness, concocting ever more elaborate schemes in order to prevent a straightforward path from difficulty to redemption for Fantine.

Initially, the women in the infirmary are loath to take care of Fantine, but her humility and gentleness wins them over. However, she does not seem to be recovering her health. The doctor tells Madeleine that the child will need to come quickly. He sends another letter, signed by Fantine, and vows to get Cosette herself if he has to.

The narrator stresses once again how people can be quick to condemn, but ultimately can also come to understand someone's character over time. Now Madeleine's unwitting mistake takes on far more serious proportions.

Chapter 2 One morning Madeleine is in his study preparing for his trip to Montfermeil, when Javert says he wants to speak with him. Upon entering, it's clear that Javert has just gone through a severe inner struggle. Javert tells the mayor he's made a grave mistake and failed in his duty, and he should be turned out. After the scene with Fantine, Javert says, he had informed against the mayor at the Prefecture of Police in Paris—due to a number of factors, he had come to believe that Madeleine was Jean Valjean, a captive whom he'd known in the galleys, and who is now wanted for robbing a bishop and a small Savoyard boy. The response Javert received was that he was mad, he says, and now he knows it's true, since it seems that a man named Champmathieu was just arrested for stealing apples, and an ex-convict named Brevet recognized him as Jean Valjean. They're the same age, from the same place, and Javert has recognized him too—he is sure. With his previous conviction, it will be the galleys for life. Javert himself will go to trial to give testimony.

Javert, for all his harshness and lack of compassion, believes wholeheartedly in the system of justice decreed by French law. He holds himself to this same standard, which is why he's willing to hand in his resignation. But this situation, which he believes to be a catastrophe for himself and a boon for Madeleine, will in fact end up being precisely the opposite. We also get an explicit explanation for Javert's suspicion of Madeleine, as the Bishop and Savoyard boy mentioned create a tidy triangular relationship to what was mentioned in describing Madeleine. Again, it's difficult if not impossible for characters in the novel to escape their past.


Madeleine says he's not interested in the details. He asks Javert to take care of several other matters, but Javert says he is leaving for the trial tomorrow; it will last one day only. Madeleine says that he will not dismiss him, and that he's a man of honor. Javert says he doesn't want to be treated kindly and generously: such treatment was what he had reproached Madeleine for in his dealings with others. He will continue until he is replaced, Javert says.

Here Madeleine and Javert's opposing systems of justice clash with each other again. One is based on fairness, punishment, and revenge, and the other is based on compassion, forgiveness, and mercy. As a result, the two men seem to be talking past each other throughout this scene.



VOLUME 1, BOOK 7: THE CHAMPMATHIEU AFFAIR

Chapter 1 On the afternoon following his visit with Javert, Madeleine goes to see Fantine, and summons Sister Simplice, a gentle, austere old woman, known for never having told a lie. The woman had grown affectionate towards Fantine. Madeleine asks her to continue to care for her, and then stays with Fantine for an entire hour. At one point, the doctor says that she is losing ground fast. Later that day Madeleine's clerk sees him examining a map of France.

Sister Simplice is another of Hugo's minor female characters, wholeheartedly good and obedient but also somewhat lacking agency or energetic spark. Still, she's one of the few who treated Fantine with mercy, so Madeleine trusts her as he's apparently making plans in another facet of his life.

Chapter 2 That night, Madeleine asks at the town stable for a horse and cabriolet (carriage) that can travel 20 leagues in a day. The owner remarks that he has only one horse that can do such a trip, and he gives Madeleine directions for keeping the horse alert. He asks where the mayor is going, but Madeleine doesn't answer. He only asks how much the horse and cabriolet are worth, and gives the owner a bill for 500 francs when he tells him, as a guarantee. When he returns home, he paces his room all evening.

The narrator withholds from us exactly what Madeleine is preparing to do and where he's preparing to go, allowing us to retain our own conjectures. The owner of the horse and cabriolet is similarly left in the dark. Madeleine attempts to conceal his traces as best he can, though as we've already seen, such an attempt may be hopeless.

Chapter 3 The narrator suggests that the reader must already know that Madeleine is Jean Valjean. Man bears infinity within him, he says, and like Dante before the door of hell, we now must hesitate but then enter into the soul of a human being: Valjean. He had been transfigured after robbing Gervais, his conscious saddened by the past but living in peace and hopeful. His only two desires were to conceal his name and to return to God. These goals made him kindly and simple, but sometimes clashed, such as when he used his notorious strength to save Fauchelevent. But this is the first time the two are in severe contradiction.

As he's done before and will do again, the narrator emphasizes the importance of not being afraid to closely study the most frightening aspects of society and the human conscience. This fear is linked to darkness and thus moral confusion and ignorance. In attempting to erase his past, Valjean has been able to enact a great deal of good, but now it seems that he has not entirely redeemed himself, since his past has returned.


Valjean first turns instinctively to self-preservation. That night, he is faced with his conscience and with God. He is tormented and in anguish, fearing that his new life is on the brink of ruin. He could never have imagined that by confronting the phantom of Jean Valjean, the goodness of Madeleine would have emerged more respected than ever. He acknowledges that his proper place is in the galleys for the theft from Gervais, but then begins to think that his one danger—that he would be revealed as the true Valjean—is no longer a possibility, and through no active guilt of his own. Perhaps it's Providence, he thinks, but feels despair rather than joy.

In confronting a new decision, Valjean is also confronted with his past choices, and now he must face the ways in which these past choices threaten to undo all the good he's been able to accomplish in M.-sur-M. Does this good make up for the evil he'd done before? Does it make up for the theft from Little Gervais? Distraught at this choice, Valjean initially turns to "providence" as a way of not having to decide his own path—and of denying any responsibility for it.


Valjean asks himself about his just-settled resolve, and confesses to himself that to "let things take their course" is just as sinful as acting. He does have another object in life, not just to conceal his name but to save his soul and become a just man. By morally murdering another man, he would become an assassin, but by surrendering himself to save him, he would actually achieve his own resurrection. He feels suddenly as if the Bishop is present. He decides he must go to Arras and reveal himself. Valjean begins to make preparations, writing a letter to his banker Laffitte. For the first time, he sees the two ideas that had ruled his soul—concealing his name and sanctifying his life—as totally distinct. He recognizes that the latter can only be good, but the first could turn bad and emanate from darkness.

Here Valjean turns back from denial to reality, understanding that in the moral system that he's attempted to adhere to during his time in M.-sur-M., neither intention nor lack of direct responsibility can serve as excuses for not acting. This passage is full of Christian imagery of sacrifice, resurrection, and redemption, a connection further underlined by the fact that Valjean thinks of the Bishop as he tries to decide what to do. In addition, Hugo once again ties darkness to evil, as he links light to ultimate goodness.


Valjean feels on the brink of another crisis and grand test. He thinks that perhaps Champmathieu was guilty of stealing apples, and then again that his own heroism might allow mercy to be bestowed on him, but he soon remembers that the theft of little Gervais will count as a second offense after conviction, and commit him to life in the galleys. His choice, he realizes, is virtue on the outside and abomination within, or else the opposite. He reverts to his former stupor, finally recalling that he had resolved to inform against himself, before suddenly thinking of Fantine.

Even Valjean's invocation of the Bishop cannot fully allow him to emerge from his internal turmoil. He desperately tries to think of ways out of the quagmire, but continues to come up against the system of justice that he's constructed for himself. Only when he thinks of another person, Fantine, is this system of justice challenged in a meaningful way.

Fantine adds a wrinkle to the ethics of Valjean's plan—in fact, he's been egotistical in only thinking of himself. If he denounces himself, the town could well descend back into ruin, and this woman would never see her child—who knows what would happen to the child. Again, Valjean repeats that Champmathieu is guilty of something, a theft, and that it would be absurd for him to denounce himself, and would lead only to much greater evil.

Now another wrinkle is added to Valjean's mental tumult: would giving himself up ultimately be more selfish than continuing to conceal his identity for the benefit of Fantine and of the community of M.-sur-M.?

Valjean turns the key in his cupboard and takes out his knapsack, which contains the possessions he had arrived at D--- with. He prepares to throw it into the fire. He catches sight of the Bishop's **candlesticks** among the possessions, and is about to throw them in as well. He seems to hear a voice calling his name, beseeching him to complete this, destroy everything, forget the Bishop. Remain honorable and honored, the voice says, while another man bears your name. Valjean continues to pace back and forth, distraught and confused. He is terrified to leave the peaceful existence he has created here and return to the convict gang and ankle chain, especially now that he is no longer young. As he paces, he begins to simply ask himself two questions: should he denounce himself, or keep quiet? He feels that whatever he decides, something in him must die. By the middle of the night he has made no progress in reaching a decision.

The Bishop's candlesticks, which Valjean has kept as one of his prized possessions ever since his encounter at D---, serve as a reminder of the mercy bestowed upon him by the Bishop, and a reminder of the new life path Valjean had promised to follow. By throwing the candlesticks and his other possessions away, Valjean would destroy some of the last items that could create a link between him and his former life, but he would also be rejecting the possibility given to him by the Bishop. The candlesticks are both the connection to Valjean's past life and sins, and the symbol of his present and future, if he continues along the same path.

Chapter 4 Valjean falls asleep and has a nightmare in which he's in a vast plain with no grass, walking with his brother, whom he barely remembers. A man passes silently by them, nude with no hair and mounted on a horse, carrying a heavy switch. They turn onto another road and reach the village of Romainville. Valjean asks where they are, but no one answers. He wanders into the village, where all the streets are deserted and all the doors open, but behind each door stands a silent man, all of whom watch him pass. Finally, he sees a great crowd behind him approaching, and one person asks where he's going, since he has been dead all along. He opens his mouth to answer, but no one is there, and he wakes up.

Hugo often uses dreams as a device for characters to work out what they should do, though a dream's system of reason, cause, and consequence is different than that of waking life. Here, the overwhelming feeling of the dream is one of loneliness and alienation. Valjean is turned away everywhere, as he had been in D---, and the crowd behind him seems to reflect the judgment and condemnation that Valjean has felt for much of his life—and that he may fear will follow him even to his death.

Valjean goes to the window and thinks he sees low-hung stars, but they turn out to be the lights of the cabriolet (carriage). He tells his porter he's arriving.

Having failed to make a decision, Valjean now finds at least part of the decision being made for him.

Chapter 5 Early that morning, the postman notices Valjean's cabriolet speeding towards Arras. Still, Valjean himself still doesn't know what he'll do. Whatever the case, he should judge the matters himself, with his own eyes, at trial. He pauses at Hesdin shortly after daybreak, and meets a stableman who says that Valjean's wheel has suffered serious damage, and he'll need a day to fix it. Valjean says this is impossible—he must set out within the hour—but the stableman says he doesn't even have a pair of wheels that will fit the axle. There is only an old wheelwagon, worth little, that would take two post-horses, but that would take until tomorrow as well. Finally, Valjean says he will go on horseback—but this horse won't bear a saddle. After continuing to ask questions to determine if there's any other way, Valjean feels an immense joy, and that Providence has intervened: there's nothing else he can do.

The narrator often sets up a scene by taking on the perspective of a minor character or someone who never again appears in the book. This device helps to underline the interrelationship of decisions, and the inability for characters like Valjean to entirely erase their pasts, since there might always be a witness to their choices. Once again, Valjean grows relieved at the intervention of "Providence"—if his failure to arrive at the trial is beyond his control, it means that he cannot be forced to assume guilt or responsibility for what happens (even if what does happen turns out to be objectively unjust).


At that moment, a young boy—who had been listening to the conversation and then ran off—returns with an old woman, who says she can let Valjean borrow her cabriolet. He shudders, but pays for the cart, and finally tells himself that he is not necessarily losing anything merely by going to trial. Near twilight, he reaches a town called Tinques, where a road-mender suggests he goes to an inn to rest and be guided through the cross-roads, an easier way to get to Arras. Stiff with cold and very hungry, Valjean wonders if he'll even arrive before the end of the trial.

"Providence" has turned against Valjean once again, here in the guise of a young boy who, ironically, believes he is being kind and helpful. Valjean is still ethically suspended—he has not yet made a choice as to whether he should reveal himself at the trial or simply remain silent. Still, he seems to be implicitly punishing himself already through the cold, hard journey to Arras.


Chapter 6 Fantine, on the other hand, feels joyful, despite having a painful night. She continually asks to see Madeleine. At three o'clock, when he usually comes, she waits for him, and feels melancholy when he doesn't arrive. She begins to sing lullabies that she used to sing to Cosette. At six, the porter tells Sister Simplice that Madeleine had left and would not be back that evening. When Fantine hears what has happened, she beams, saying that he has gone to get Cosette. She begins to tell Sister Simplice all about her daughter. She grows rosy and lively, convinced that she'll see Cosette in the morning. The doctor even says to the Sister that if he does arrive with the child, there might be a way of saving Fantine.

Fantine, her thoughts about the mayor having been utterly transformed, now remains steadfast in her trust that Madeleine will remain the key to her salvation, and to the protection of her daughter. Even Madeleine's departure—whether or not he ultimately betrays himself—already seems to be an unsatisfactory compromise, given that Fantine's health is quickly deteriorating, and the reader knows, even if she doesn't, that she may not have much time to live.

Chapter 7 Near nightfall Valjean arrives at an inn in Arras. He asks a citizen passing by with a lantern where the court-house is. The man is going that way himself, but tells him that cases generally close at six. Valjean finally arrives in a large crowded hall: at the end of it is a massive closed door to the courtroom. The first lawyer Valjean approaches tells him that the jury has just finished: they've decided on jail for life. But then the lawyer continues to talk about the case—a woman's infanticide. It turns out that the hall is still lit for another case, which began two hours ago—for a convict apparently guilty of theft. Seeing that nothing has been settled, Valjean breathes freely again.

The man whom Valjean encounters along the way serves as another suggestion that Valjean has arrived too late, and that he no longer needs to feel guilty or responsible. But when he learns that the jury has sentenced the man, he feels constricted rather than relieved, and then he feels a new sense of relief upon learning that the verdict has not in fact been handed down. Valjean's feelings of guilt and responsibility are very complicated.

As he listens to groups whispering outside the hall, he hears that all are convinced that the man had already been in the galleys, and would probably be condemned. He asks the usher when the door will be opened; he says it won't be, since the courtroom is full. Valjean crosses the hall, his head hung and his internal conflict still raging. Then, he takes out a pen and writes "Madeleine, Mayor of M. Sur M." on a note. He tells the usher to take it to the judge.

Now, when Valjean is faced with a possible way out of his quandary, he reacts to it not with relieved passivity but rather with a renewed desire to act. He even has to actively put his creativity into use to ensure that he makes it into the courtroom: here, taking advantage of his eminent position as mayor.

Chapter 8 Madeleine is relatively well-known in the area, and the judge writes on the back of the note to admit him. Valjean follows the usher through to the judge's chamber—the entry to the courtroom. He looks around, thinking of Fantine and Cosette. He gazes at the door to the courtroom, terrified, and then suddenly wheels around and goes back through the door he came in through. He paces back and forth, and then reenters the chamber. At once, not knowing himself how it happened, he finds himself in front of the doorknob. He seizes it and enters the courtroom.

Here, Madeleine's most recent past does in fact serve as proof for his character (proof that his more distant past as a convict might nevertheless weaken). Madeleine's choice now seems boiled down to two options: save Fantine and Cosette, or save Champmathieu. Finally, he chooses the latter, underlining his commitment to honesty in addition to justice.

Chapter 9 At one end of the hall are the distracted-looking judges, and at the other, a crowd of lawyers, soldiers, and others, lit up by smoky lamps and candles: they create a severe impression. Valjean catches sight of the defendant, and thinks he's looking at himself grown old, though colored by hatred and bitterness. Valjean is suddenly faced with real judges, gendarmes, and a gossipy crowd once again. He shuts his eyes and shouts "Never!" to himself.

Champmathieu is accused of being Valjean, and in fact, Valjean recognizes his past self in the man, showing the common fate of men subjected to the galleys. He feels that he himself is on trial, and the former world of judgment, condemnation, and misery rushes back into him, making him hesitate in his decision.

M. Bamatabois (the dandy tormenting Fantine earlier) is one of the jurors, but Valjean cannot see Javert. The defense has just rested its case. The audience is excited by the prior three hours, in which they've heard damning condemnations of the defendant: Champmathieu shook his head or simply stared ahead. The crowd and jury both seem puzzled by the man's seeming apathy, wondering whether he is dim-witted or crafty. The defense lawyer says that Champmathieu merely picked up some apples rather than stole them. The only evidence against him is his character as an ex-convict. Despite Champmathieu's denial, the lawyer concedes that he is indeed Valjean, though saying this doesn't prove he was the thief.

The trial makes clear how much the legal justice system allows people to witness and even take part in the judgment and condemnation of others, making them satisfied with themselves in their own freedom from such judgment. The narrator's portrayal of the social aspect of justice is severe. This scene shows how difficult it can be for someone assumed to be a "convict"—this is the aspect of the story even the defense lawyer doesn't question—to free himself from suspicion as a human being.


The district attorney, in turn, had taken the opportunity to eloquently detail the monstrousness of Jean Valjean—including the fact that he would even dare to deny everything this time around, against the words of five separate people.

The attorney's eloquence serves not only to condemn the accused, but also to further inflame the passions of the audience and incite their desire for "justice."

Chapter 10 Finally, Champmathieu is asked if he has anything to add to his defense. He first seems not to hear the question, but then begins a rambling speech about his job as a wheelwright in Paris and the hardship associated with it. At the end he names several people who can confirm that he worked there. When he stops, the audience bursts into laughter, and Champmathieu stares at them before beginning to laugh himself—an inauspicious sign. In response to the district attorney's and the judge's questions, he continues to claim that he's not Jean Valjean, finally bursting out that both of them are wicked, and that he does not know how else to prove that he isn't Valjean.

For Champmathieu, the trial has been absurd: he's listened to a litany of descriptions and condemnations of another man, and cannot see how to free himself from suspicion other than by describing in minute detail his own identity and his own past. But these details only seem absurd to the audience in turn. His laughter underlines the absurdity that he sees in this trial, though this is lost among the public and the jury.

The district attorney reminds the jury of Javert 's earlier testimony and of his upstanding character: Javert had said that he recognized the man perfectly. The ex-convict Brevet, as well, is placed on the stand and swears that he recognizes Champmathieu as Valjean, with whom he worked in the galleys. Two other convicts, Chenildieu and Cochepaille, swear the same thing, as Champmathieu shakes his head in amazement. After the third testimony, the audience breaks into an uproar: it is certain that the man is lost.

Javert's character as a police inspector hell-bent on achieving justice gives him great legitimacy and accountability among the jury. It's difficult to see how all these witnesses can claim that Champmathieu is really Valjean, apart from the general cloud of suspicion that is cast on anyone even thought to be associated with the prison system.

Chapter 11 At that moment, Madeleine enters the courtroom. In the hour since he's arrived in Arras, his hair has turned from gray to white. The audience hesitates, and Madeleine advances towards the three convicts, asking if they recognize him. They're speechless and shake their heads. Madeleine turns to the jury and tells them to order the prisoner to be released and to have himself arrested: he is Jean Valjean. The audience remains entirely silent, while the judge whispers that a physician should be called. Madeleine thanks him but says he is not mad. He acknowledges that he robbed the Bishop and Gervais. He says that in the galleys he became both stupid and vicious before being saved by indulgence and kindness. He turns back to the convicts, reminding each of them of a detail of their time together in the galleys which only he could have known.

The change of Madeleine's hair from gray to white underlines the acute moral quandary that he's been facing for the past 24 hours. It's not until this moment that Madeleine knows for sure whether or not he'll betray himself. Even now, it's only action that has replaced contemplation, and it's unclear if Madeleine has even settled on his decision as the rational, ideal choice. Ironically, Madeleine's affirmations, just like Champmathieu's denials of being Valjean, are initially dismissed—but unlike Champmathieu, Madeleine has and is willing to use incontrovertible proof.

Suddenly, it becomes evident that the man is indeed Jean Valjean. No one moves, and Valjean says that he will withdraw since he's not being arrested, and he has much to do: the district attorney can have him arrested when he likes. He walks out the door, and an hour later, the jury frees Champmathieu, who goes off stupefied and uncomprehending.

Dismissal and then uncertainty have now been replaced by uncomprehending stupefaction. It initially appears as though Valjean's earlier wish might be fulfilled, that his confession would absolve him and free him from retribution.

VOLUME 1, BOOK 8: A COUNTER-BLOW

As the next day dawns, Valjean returns to Fantine. Sister Simplice says that Fantine will be upset not to see Cosette. Sister Simplice says that they cannot tell a lie and pretend that Cosette is here—but if Fantine just doesn't see the mayor, they won't have to. But Valjean insists on seeing her. Fantine is asleep and looks pale and angelic. Then she wakes up, smiles, and says, "And Cosette?"

Sister Simplice's emphasis on not telling a lie begins to clash here with a separate question, one of mercy shown to Fantine, and now she too must make a decision about her moral priorities. For Valjean, this kind of mercy immediately overtakes any other considerations he might have.

Chapter 2 Valjean is rendered speechless by Fantine's certainty. She asks him again to bring Cosette into the room, but the doctor enters, and says that she must be cured first. Fantine protests, saying that she cannot wait, but then bows her head and apologizes for contradicting the doctor. She asks Valjean how Cosette is doing, and he says she is beautiful and well and that Fantine will see her soon. A child is playing and singing in the yard outside the window, and Fantine imagines it is Cosette.

Again, Valjean feels fewer moral scruples than Sister Simplice in lying to Cosette in the interest of preserving Fantine's health and happiness. Here, Fantine has reverted to the sweet, simple, and meek child that had gone to Paris from the countryside, as is shown in her obedience towards the doctor and to Valjean.

Suddenly Fantine turns silent and pale, and as Valjean turns around he sees Javert in the doorway.

Javert, for Fantine, is the antithesis to Madeleine's mercy.

Chapter 3 Immediately after Valjean had left the court earlier that day, the district attorney had insisted the man was mad. He was at odds with what everyone else believed, but ultimately the district attorney was committed to convicting a Jean Valjean, so he sent Javert off to arrest Madeleine. Javert had seemed cool and calm, and upon reaching Fantine's room his face took on the terrible aspect of the demon who has just found a damned soul and feels enormously satisfied—especially after his pride had been wounded by accusing the wrong man. Javert feels that he has authority, reason, and the law on his side against evil. The narrator notes that sincerity, conviction, and duty can be noble and majestic, but can become hideous when misdirected by error.

The district attorney seems to have a unique notion of justice. Once the gears of the legal system have been set into motion, he cannot accept that no one is at fault, so someone must be pursued and punished. The narrator portrays Javert as a complex symbol of authority. On the one hand, his apparent satisfaction at having "caught" Valjean—thus redeeming his own mistake—seems petty and wrong, but seen from another way, Valjean is in fact a convict, and Javert possesses a narrow but strong desire to pursue what he sees as justice.

Chapter 4 Fantine is terrified and shouts to Madeleine to save her, but he tells her that Javert has not come for her. Javert grabs Valjean by the collar, and while Fantine shrieks, Valjean asks Javert if he can say a word to him alone. Javert refuses to give him a private ear, so Valjean asks right there if he may be given three days to fetch the child of this woman. Fantine then realizes that Cosette is not there. Javert tells her that the mayor is in fact a common thief. Fantine looks from one to the other, opening her mouth as if to speak, but her teeth chatter and she falls back on the pillow, dead.

For Fantine, Javert epitomizes the danger of the law for those who are forced to live below or outside it. Her anxiety is then transferred to Javert's new prey, Madeleine, as it seems that Fantine's enemy is now subduing her hero. Javert essentially forces Valjean to give up the ruse he had carefully cultivated, that Cosette was in fact present. Again guilt and responsibility grow complex here, as both Valjean and Javert have in a way caused Fantine's death.

Valjean says to Javert that he's murdered her, but Javert angrily yells at him to follow him. Valjean whispers to him not to disturb him for a moment, and Javert trembles but stays still. For a few moments, Valjean speaks to Fantine. No one hears him, but to Sister Simplice it seems Fantine's lips break into a smile. Then, Valjean says he is at Javert's disposal.

For a moment, even Javert seems to bow to Valjean's quiet fury and acknowledge the moral rightness of what he is about to do. Valjean subsequently understands that his past has finally caught up with him, and accepts this.

Chapter 5 Javert brings Valjean to prison. At the word "convict," nearly everyone in town deserts him, forgetting all the good he had done, and the indignant gossip spreads through the town. Only a few people remember him fondly and sadly, including the porter who had served him.

Just as the association of Champmathieu with the word "convict" had condemned him, these same suggestions cause the townspeople to desert Valjean and revive their old judgments and suspicions.

The first evening after his arrest, the porter prepares Madeleine's room without thinking, then sighs at the realization that he's gone. But at that moment the lodge's window opens and a hand seizes the key—it's Valjean. He broke a window bar and escaped. He asks the porter to fetch Sister Simplice but doesn't explain how he got past the large courtyard gates (and no one ever finds out). He takes the 40-sou piece and **candlesticks** that he had thrown into the fire and writes a note saying that these are the stolen goods he had mentioned at court. Sister Simplice comes into the room, her eyes red, and Valjean gives her money and asks her to use it for the funeral of Fantine.

The porter, one of the few who has retained a love for Valjean, is now rewarded for this loyalty by being present and able to assist Valjean in his escape. The 40-sou piece and candlesticks are again reminders of the past life Valjean had believed he had shaken off. Here, they seem to serve as both evidence for this past life and as a suggestion for the path Valjean will now take, including paying respect to Fantine through a proper funeral.

They hear the porter downstairs swearing that no one has entered the house all day. Javert 's voice responds saying that there's a light in the upstairs room. Valjean blows out the light, and Javert enters, as the nun is praying. Javert has great respect for all authority, and his first instinct is to withdraw, but he knows Sister Simplice has never told a lie in her life. He asks if she's alone, and she says yes. Then says she has not seen Valjean —lying twice. Javert asks her forgiveness and withdraws: he pays no attention to the candle, just extinguished, on the table.

Javert is clearly not a brute—his understanding of legal and moral hierarchies gives him a belief in a certain kind of respect, even if this is different from the kind of mercy shown by Valjean. Sister Simplice has already struggled between her desire never to lie and other ethical questions, but only now does she overcome this (morally defensible) position for what she sees as a more just motivation.

The priest responsible for the money that Valjean had given to Sister Simplice for Fantine's proper burial believed he was doing right in not using all of it, since the affair concerned only a convict and a prostitute. Fantine is thus buried in a pauper's grave, where only God knows where to find her.

Like the superintendent at Fantine's workhouse, this priest believes he is acting for good, and so the narrator again shows how justice can be warped even by those who are well-intentioned.

VOLUME 2, BOOK 1: WATERLOO

Chapter 1 Last year (for the narrator, 1861), the narrator was walking from Nivelles to La Hulpe, when he passed through a valley home to several inns and other buildings. He found himself before a large stone door, across from a meadow with wild flowers. There was a large circular hole at the foot of the door, and a peasant woman emerged, remarking that this hole was made by a French cannon ball. Higher near the door, she said, was the hole of a bullet. The place is called Hougomont, she said. The narrator continued walking on, and arrived at an elevation where he could look out on the battlefield of Waterloo.

This is the first time that the narrator actually enters into his own story, which now jumps forward several decades to around the time of the publication of Les Misérables. *This intrusion will ultimately be connected back to the plot of the novel, but it will also give the narrator time and space to develop some of the important themes of the book, even if here they are only tangentially related to the plot itself.*

Chapter 2 Hougomont is the site of the beginning of the resistance to Napoleon, the beginning of his end. It was once a chateau, but now is only a group of farms. Napoleon sent multiple generals with their soldiers against it, but none managed to conquer it. The horror of combat still lingers in some courtyards, echoing the agony of those who died there. English guards had been in ambush in the rooms of one house, which now is overgrown with ivy and dirt. There had been a massacre in the chapel, which is now no longer used. The well was turned into a grave for hundreds of bodies, which the soldiers were anxious to bury after the battle. Only one house in the ruin is still inhabited, by the grandchildren of the old gardener Guillaume van Kylsom, whom the British had forced to be their servant when they invaded.

Napoleon has been mentioned earlier in the novel, particularly relating to the Bishop's disapproval of his continental conquests and hubris in wanting to extend the French empire. Here, Napoleon is mentioned as a historical reference and means of contextualizing the site of Hougomont and the battle of Waterloo, but Hugo's other purpose is to minutely detail the sites of destruction, terror, and death through "physiognomic" descriptions that allow the reader to relive these historical moments.

Between the garden and the orchard beside it are a number of holes made by the British firing outwards and the French attacking. The French had managed to take the orchard. The trees still bear traces of bullets and bayonets. English, French, and German blood had been spilt here: 3,000 deaths in Hougomont alone.

Even in 1861, decades after Waterloo, physical traces of the battle remain in the trees, symbolizing the persistence of history (perhaps even more so than human memory) in certain places.

Chapter 3 The narrator suggests we turn back to 1815 to explain what happened around the action of this book. Europe's fate would have been different if it hadn't rained on the night of June 17th, he says. The battle of Waterloo had to be delayed because of wet ground, which made it impossible for the artillery to maneuver. Napoleon, an artillery officer, wanted to use his artillery's advantage over the smaller British artillery. But as it was, the delay gave more Prussians time to arrive, and ultimately helped them win. The narrator asks, as other historians have, if the defeat was all Napoleon's fault: if his forces had weakened, his desire for adventure had become unrealistic, or if any of these are true, as Napoleon's battle plan was a masterpiece. But he cannot give a full history of the battle, since he is only a distant witness.

Again the narrator stresses the interconnectedness of history and narrative, of broad political decisions and minor personal activities. Like Tolstoy in War and Peace, *Hugo is interested in destiny (Tolstoy wonders whether Napoleon wouldn't have been turned back from Russia if he didn't happen to have a cold). Here, chance—perhaps the other side of fate and destiny—serves as an opportunity to reflect on how things could have been different, and how one small aspect of history can have enormous unforeseen results—in one's own life as well as in history writ large.*

Chapter 4 The narrator suggests that to visualize the battle one imagine a capital A on the ground: each limb of the letter is a road and each tip a town: at the center is the final battle. Wellington, the English general, had already studied the terrain, and for this battle the English had the better position. The figure of Napoleon on horseback at daybreak is well-known, so the narrator doesn't feel the need to describe him. History is a pitiless **light**, the narrator states, and the shadows of the tyrant often mingle with the brilliancy of the great leader.

Again the narrator introduces the symbols of light and darkness to represent heroic character versus moral malice, here in a political context. Napoleon is treated ambivalently throughout the text, as many characters do consider him a "brilliant," great leader, while others judge his actions to be those of a tyrant, and still others struggle to categorize him as a historical figure.

Chapter 5 The beginning of the battle was uncertain for both parties, but worse for the English. It began at around half past eleven in the morning. Napoleon tried to make a feint by attacking Hougomont and drawing Wellington away from other places, but the English held their positions strongly. The English army had many young, raw recruits, whose inexperience paradoxically made them fight harder and better. In the afternoon, the battle became a dizzy mirage, and each historian has taken from it what pleases him to notice. In fact, chaos is the only rule of battle, and historians can only seize the general outline of the struggle, without being able to enter into particular descriptions and individual depictions.

At first, the narrator sticks to clear, straightforward language and known facts about the way that the battle initially developed. But this unidealized description soon gives way to Hugo's recurrent philosophies about history. Here, the emphasis is on how difficult it is to do what he's suggested earlier—concentrate on individual, particular stories rather than grand narratives—in the haze and chaos of a battle. The history of war, it's suggested, is inherently partial and uneven.

Chapter 6 By 4:00 the English were in bad straits, with several generals and colonels killed. But the center still held on the plateau of Mont-Saint-Jean. The English drew back, and Napoleon shouted that this was the beginning of their retreat.

The narrator now reverts to chronological description. There's some dramatic irony at play in the way Napoleon so confidently states the French will soon triumph.

Chapter 7 Napoleon was in a wonderful humor that day: the narrator notes that even destiny's favorites make mistakes, and only God knows all that will happen. Napoleon was convinced he could take all the English as prisoners. The narrator notes that the field of Waterloo has changed greatly from what it was during the battle. Two great tombs, English and German, now dot two meadows, while the entire plain is a tomb for the French. On June 18th, 1815, there was a steep slope creating a plateau, along which ran a kind of trench—an old hollow road, where so many accidents had happened that it was no longer used. However, it meant that those below could not see what was happening on the plateau.

The narrator assumes that the reader will know the outcome of Waterloo: the French are defeated by a joint army of the English and Prussians. In examining the day of the battle in detail, with the outcome a foregone conclusion, the narrator is able to return to nuances of the battlefield—like the old hollow road—and make conjectures on destiny and human versus divine will. This will be a largely unconventional tale of the battle of Waterloo, compared to classic accounts.

Chapter 8 Napoleon thought little about all the possible things that could go wrong that day, instead preferring to shake his head at fate, believing it to be in his favor. With Wellington in retreat, he gave orders to attack the plateau of Mont-Saint-Jean.

The narrator contrasts his own focus on the weaknesses of the French position with Napoleon's cavalier attitude in assuming that he was free from fate.

Chapter 9 3,500 Frenchmen began to attack, looking formidable. They ascended the slope of the plateau and could only be seen through clouds of smoke amid a huge clamor, like figures from an ancient epic. Beyond the crest of the plateau the English were waiting. All at once, the French reached the hollow, moving too quickly to halt, and the horses dived into it, the following ranks piling up behind them.

The narrator's language indeed recalls that of an epic, which has the effect (paradoxically, since it contradicts his previously stated goals) of transforming the soldiers from modern, particular humans into vague and mythic figures.

The narrator says it was impossible for Napoleon to have won the battle, not because of Wellington but because of God. The laws of the 19th century did not allow it: the individual figure of Napoleon had held too much power for too long, and it was time for civilization at large to regain its command.

While the narrator stresses the importance of individual figures in history, this doesn't necessarily extend to history's "great men," as he suggests that such figures can never conquer all of civilization for any extended period of time.

Chapter 10 At the ravine, the whole battle turned. One French column had been able to skirt the ravine, and they hurled themselves on the English. Each one of the French was equal to ten English, but they soon found themselves overwhelmed. Even as the English were extraordinarily weakened, they continued to hold the plateau. At 5:00, Wellington drew out his watch and muttered, "Blucher, or night!" At that moment a distant line of bayonets gleamed in the twilight.

The language of this section betrays some nationalistic leanings, as the narrator affirms the strength and courage of the French even when overwhelmed by their enemy. As night approaches, France's inevitable defeat approaches as well. Here darkness is the sign of material ruin.

Chapter 11 This surprise was the arrival of the Germans, led by Blucher—if he had arrived two hours earlier, Napoleon would have won.

This is another opportunity for the narrator to muse on the mysterious workings of fate and lack of human control.

Chapter 12 Everyone, says the narrator, knows the rest: Blucher turned the battle against the French, and roused the English back to strength. The French yelled "Vive l'empereur" and continued to advance, but it was total suicide. One general, Ney, offered himself to all the English bullets, but none struck him: he was fated to be killed by his own people instead.

The narrator glosses over what other historians would normally focus on—the military strategies that provoked this change of fortune—to instead concentrate on individual details, like Ney's charge through incoming bullets.

Chapter 13 The French finally were forced to disband, each man trying to save himself. Heroism disappeared, as friends killed each other to escape and paid no attention to the entreaties of Napoleon, galloping past, whom they barely recognized. One column tried to rally at Genappe, but Blucher ordered extermination, and again this column fled. For the narrator, this downfall is not without a cause, but is instead a reminder of destiny. He calls Waterloo the hinge of the 19th century, which was needed to make the one great man disappear. God passed by here, he says. That evening Napoleon, haggard and somber, went back alone to Waterloo, as if advancing again.

Once again, Hugo's interest in the desperate, less heroic side of humanity emerges, as the remarks on French heroism give way to a stark description of the utter chaos of defeat. However, the French soldiers are exempted from full responsibility for this lack of heroism by means of what Hugo believes is the historical necessity of the French defeat. Napoleon's return to Waterloo, haggard rather than triumphant, reflects this world-historical shift.

Chapter 14 That night, each regiment, abandoned and conquered, died alone. When, at the foot of the plateau, one legion had more corpses than survivors, the English artillery gave pause. An English general shouted to them to surrender, and Cambronne, a French general, shouted an expletive back to them.

Brief glimpses of heroic behavior could, according to the narrator, still be found in individual actions such as those of Cambronne, even if they were not to be seen in official battlefield moves.

Chapter 15 The winner of Waterloo was Cambronne, according to the narrator, because of his courageous reply, which recognized that the offer of life was only a mockery. The English responded, "Fire!" and annihilated the rest of the legion.

The sacrifice of one's own life by clinging to honor is portrayed here as an example of heroism, and also as a way to muddy and undermine the triumph of the English.

Chapter 16 Waterloo is an enigma; no one knows exactly what happened there, including the historians. No single man played a significant part in it. Waterloo was merely the rest of Europe's winning number in the lottery against France. It was not Wellington but the English, with English firmness and resolution, that should be admired in the battle. Wellington was only a hero like any other. Out of 144,000 combatants, 60,000 were killed. Today Waterloo is a calm, nondescript field, but at night the catastrophe seems to arise again in a kind of nightmare.

Again the narrator stresses both that Napoleon lost his individual might at Waterloo, and that "history" as it is normally performed is an imperfect tool for understanding what really happened. The narrator also contrasts the focus on single generals and leaders with the unimaginable numbers of regular people who died at battle, whom he asks us to remember.

Chapter 17 For the narrator, Waterloo cannot be considered good. It was the death knell to the age of revolution, even though Napoleon's empire had grown tyrannical. However, Louis XVIII did agree to a constitutional charter after the battle, leaving one small flame of revolution alive. Progress is inevitable; Waterloo only cut short one means of revolution, allowing it to be continued in another direction. The victory at Waterloo, then, was a counter-revolution that did not mean to be progressive. On June 18th, Robespierre was thrown from his saddle.

The narrator suggests that even without promoting or even condoning war, one can find positive consequences in political and social spheres. Robespierre, the revolutionary who became the leader of the bloody French terror, is now, the narrator suggests, no longer the model for how revolution should function: Waterloo thus serves as a turning point.

Chapter 18 The whole European system crumbled away after Waterloo. Louis XVIII reentered Paris, and monarchy was restored all over Europe. However, Napoleon became a symbol of Liberty for the people, even as the Restoration began. But for God, the narrator says, war and peace have the same value as a bug hopping from one blade of grass to another.

Many have understood Napoleon's defeat as causing a step backwards for Europe (back to pre-revolutionary monarchy), but the narrator suggests a different interpretation, even while continuing to stress people's helplessness before God.

Chapter 19 After the battle was over, the plateau of Mont-Saint-Jean remained empty. By the next day, many of the bodies had been stripped of their clothes and possessions. The guilty were the rear-guard, parasites who didn't fight in battle but sought to reap its booty. Around midnight, one of these men was roaming the field, resembling a dark nocturnal bird. There is nothing more terrible, says the narrator, than to live, laugh, and be healthy, to have a mother and wife and children, and suddenly sink into an abyss, struggle in vain, and realize that death is approaching.

The narrator contrasts the desperation and quiet dignity of those who fought and died in the battle of Waterloo with those who merely seek to benefit from others' suffering and death. The comparison of one of these "parasitic" creatures to a nocturnal bird further underlines the demonic nature of such figures, who would be afraid to roam during the day.

This prowler paused over one dead man with a ring of gold on his finger. The scavenging man took it off, but suddenly the "dead" man's hand grabbed his cloak. He dragged the man into the road: the injured man was an officer who wore the Legion of Armor. The officer asked who won the battle. At the man's response, the English, the officer told the man to take a watch and purse from his cloak. The man pretended to do this, as he had already taken them. The officer told the man that he saved his life, and asked who he was. The man said he belonged to the French army, but must now flee. The officer asked his name: it was Thenardier. The officer said his was Pontmercy.

From a wide-frame perspective that considered the battle of Waterloo as a whole, the narrator has now zoomed in on one aspect of the battle, the rear-guard prowlers, and then further focused on one "parasite" in particular. Now this section of the novel rejoins the other "books," as we learn that this figure is none other than Thenardier—a character whose nature clearly didn't change much between now and his adoption of Fantine's daughter.

VOLUME 2, BOOK 2: THE SHIP ORION

Chapter 1 It is July 1823, and Jean Valjean has been recaptured. One article from the Drapeau Blanc newspaper notes that prior to his arrest, he managed to escape and withdraw over half a million francs from M. Lafitte—but no one knows where it is. After being brought again to the Court, Valjean refused to defend himself and was condemned to penal servitude for life. With this sentence, the narrator notes, M.-sur-M.'s prosperity vanishes entirely. Good will gives way to competition and animosity, the industrial products become faulty, and bankruptcy arrives.

After the introduction of Thenardier into the battlefield scene, the narrator transitions back to the major thread of the novel. Despite having escaped with Sister Simplice's help, Valjean has apparently been captured again. Unfortunately, Valjean's fears about the ethical correctness of abandoning M.-sur-M. to clear Champmathieu's name turn out to be well-founded.

Chapter 2 Around the same time, in Montfermeil, an ancient superstition is revived: that of the devil who appears in the forest to dig holes for his treasures. If someone approaches and speaks to him, he dies within the week, and if someone grabs the treasure for himself, he dies within the month. Around the time of Valjean's brief escape from Javert, an old road-laborer and ex-convict named Boulatruelle is noticed escaping into the forest in search of something, and digging holes. People in the town ask each other if the devil will catch him. After awhile, Boulatruelle stops searching, but others in the town surmise that it's not the devil but a more worldly affair instead.

Montfermeil is the home of the Thenardiers, and this forest will play a significant role for the rest of the novel. As is often the case, the narrator takes on the point of view of various witnesses, entering the scene not just from the perspective of Boulatruelle but also from that of the townspeople who are curious to know what's going on. This device also keeps the reader at least temporarily in the dark, and suggests that there is more to the story than what initially appears.

Thenardier, who's very curious, suggests they get Boulatruelle drunk. He says very little, but they do figure out that one day, on his way to work, Boulatruelle had glimpsed a person he knew from the galleys carrying a large box into the forest with him. He lost the man in the forest, but later saw him emerge with a shovel and pick. He thus decided that money was buried somewhere in the forest—but his attempts to find it were in vain.

Knowing Thenardier as we do, we can surmise that his is not an innocent curiosity, but rather that he hopes to get something out of Boulatruelle's confession. This time, though, the reader knows more than he does, as the narrator expects us to tie this information to the money withdrawn by Valjean.

Chapter 3 Towards October in 1823, the magnificent ship Orion enters into the port of Toulon to be repaired after its participation in the "Spanish war," in which it mainly fired celebratory shots—at a cost of 300 million francs a year. The war was a matter of petty politics and slaughtered principles, in general a suspicious affair. France's goal was to subject another nation to its rule: for the narrator, this goes against the values of the French Revolution. Nevertheless, the people of Toulon are in awe at the ship with its gigantic proportions and modern design.

The narrator takes this opportunity to reflect on the wasteful and frivolous nature of most war spending. He portrays the "Spanish war" as a gratuitous spectacle. By mentioning the annual cost of its celebratory shots, and the imperialist ideas behind it, he makes an implicit contrast to the social issues within France, issues with which so much of the novel is concerned.

One morning the crowd by the ship witnesses an accident. As the crew is bending the sails, the topman loses his balance and falls toward the sea, managing to seize the footrope but remaining hanging from it with the sea far below. Not one sailor dares to try to save him. Meanwhile he is straining to keep holding on. All at once, a man dressed in red—a convict—is seen climbing into the rigging. He had asked the officer of the watch's permission to attempt to save the man. Only later do people recall how easily he had broken his ankle chain. The convict fastens another rope to the yard (a cross spar of the mast) and begins to descend along it next to the sailor, whom he secures to himself and drags back up. The crowd breaks into applause. But as the convict runs to rejoin his group, he runs along one of the lower yards and suddenly seems to stagger, and he falls into the sea. Four men rush into a boat and search for him, but he's disappeared. His number is 9,430, his name Valjean.

Once again, Hugo begins with a broad portrayal of a scene, with all the social and political points of resonance one might find there, before centering in on a particular character or moment. In this way the book continues to show the interpenetration of history and personal narrative, social politics and individual experience. The early reference to the ease with which the convict broke his chains is the first suggestion that we might be dealing with a familiar character—but by refraining from using Valjean's name, and only mentioning it after his number, the narrator reminds us of the dehumanizing nature of the prison system.

VOLUME 2, BOOK 3: ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE PROMISE MADE TO THE DEAD WOMAN

Chapter 1 In 1823, Montfermeil is only a village, not the large town it later became. Each household must fetch drinking water from a spring about 15 minutes away. Households like the Thenardiers pay a man to fetch it, but he only works until early evening. When he's not working, the Thenardiers send Cosette out, though it terrifies her to go to the spring at night.

The narrator situates Montfermeil within a particular historical moment (different from the one in which he's writing), setting the stage for a scene that follows Cosette through what is her greatest fear.

It's Christmas eve, and a number of people are drinking in the tavern of the Thenardier inn. As they talk merrily, Cosette is seated near the chimney, dressed in rags. Eponine and Azelma laugh happily in the room next to them, but the crying of a baby—born by accident to the Thenardiers—continues, since the mother can't be bothered to see to him.

The joyful holiday spirit of the tavern-goers is juxtaposed against Cosette's isolation and misery. The constant crying of the baby is another reminder that for the Thenardiers, love is limited, when it exists at all.

Chapter 2 Thenardier is around fifty, his wife a little less. Madame Thenardier has a big blotchy face and a beard. She's loud and brusque, whereas her husband is small, pale, and feeble, though extremely cunning. He is a swindler and pretends to have served in the army. He often talks about how he was a sergeant at Waterloo, and had saved a wounded general from death. He is a Bonapartist and liberal, spreading the rumor that he had studied to be a priest, though he had only studied in Holland to be an inn-keeper. He had returned from Waterloo stealing and selling items throughout the country, before settling in Montfermeil.

The physical (or "physiognomic") descriptions of Thenardier and his wife serve, as is often the case in Hugo, to make a point about their inner characters. Because of the earlier section on Waterloo, the reader knows enough to be suspicious of Thenardier's claims about the battle. In addition to his dishonesty and criminal activity, Thenardier hides his lack of integrity and claims to be the opposite kind of man.

Thenardier is the kind of man who accuses everyone else of being responsible for all his wrongs. Though Madame Thenardier's loudness makes people think that she is the master of the house, in fact he rules everything, and she submits to all his wishes. Thenardier thinks only about how to enrich himself, though in fact he's slowly ruining himself, burdened with petty debts. As a result, he is committed to wringing all the extra fees he can get out of all the travellers that come to the inn, and to get Cosette to do as much work as possible.

Thenardier is portrayed as a far different kind of criminal than Jean Valjean. Rather than being driven to crime through desperation, Thenardier is selfish, lazy, and greedy. By depicting him in such a way, the narrator suggests that mercy and forgiveness are not to be bestowed upon his type as easily as upon some other men of crime.

Chapter 3 That evening, Cosette is meditating sadly, worrying the water will run out and she will have to go the spring. Finally, one traveler says that his horse has not been watered. Cosette protests, and lies that it has. She creeps back under the table, and Madame Thenardier yells at her to take the bucket—which is bigger than she is—and go fetch water. She gives her a 15-sou piece to get bread from the baker's as well.

In Cosette's case, on the other hand, a "sin" such as lying is portrayed sympathetically, given that it stems from an innocent child's fear, which is itself exacerbated by the lack of love, care, or attention from the Thenardiers or anyone else around her.

Chapter 4 Not a star can be seen in the sky. As Cosette passes the shop stalls, she gazes at a beautiful doll in one window, saying to herself that one must be a princess to have such a toy. But then Madame Thenardier Thenardier screeches at her to hurry, and she flees.

Cosette is depicted as being not too different from other small girls in her dreams and desires, and it is only her situation of abject misery that distinguishes her.

After Cosette makes it past the stalls, the light vanishes. But she pauses at the last house before the open fields, gazing at them in despair. She suddenly runs forward, not daring to look right or left before she reaches the spring. She draws out water, and is forced to pause to rest before carrying the heavy bucket back. She is terrified by the darkness: the narrator notes that all humans require **light**, and shadows are even more sinister for a child. She begins to shiver, and then counts aloud. She seizes the pail but can hardly carry it a dozen paces before she has to put it down and rest before picking it up again.

The scene of Cosette plunging into the forest gives the narrator the chance to portray a brief allegory of the moral "darkness" that all those who live without love inhabit. This moral darkness becomes a physical, material reality for Cosette here. It's not just unpleasant but terrifying for her, and her fear is exacerbated even more by the weight of the water, which makes her task near impossible.

Suddenly she realizes that the bucket no longer seems to weigh much. She looks up and sees a tall man who has seized the handle: somehow, Cosette is not afraid.

In the midst of the darkness, the narrator suggests, enters a kind of light in the form of the stranger.

Chapter 6 Earlier that day, a man had walked across the Boulevard de l'Hopital in Paris, his apparent poverty combined with extreme cleanliness. His coat was threadbare and, from his white hair, he looked to be around 60. Around that time, Louis XVIII was known to promenade on that street, and the man, seeing the royal carriage, withdrew quickly, though not before the Duc de Havre, seated in the carriage opposite the king, noted that he had an evil look. The man slipped away, and reached the office of a coach going towards Lagny. He paid for the trip, but descended at Chelles, without entering the inn. The coachman told the other passengers that the man was unknown in these parts.

Once again, we are introduced to a man not necessarily through the narrator's eyes but rather through the perspective of witnesses—passersby, Parisian inhabitants, and even dukes and royal figures. All these witnesses note that there is something about the man that suggests he doesn't belong in the city. While he doesn't escape notice, the figure is relatively successful at remaining shadowy and anonymous, at least making his way through urban areas without being stopped.

The man followed the road to Montfermeil, arriving in the forest and carefully examining all the trees. He stopped at one, to which a band of zinc had been nailed, but then continued on. It is this man who has just met Cosette, whom he'd spied through the trees.

The second time the Montfermeil forest appears, the narrator clearly wants us to make the link to Boulatruelle and the mysterious pile of money supposedly hidden there.

Chapter 7 The man tells Cosette to let go of the bucket. He asks where her mother is, and she says she doesn't think she has one. When she tells him her name is Cosette, he seems shocked. He tells her to lead him to the inn, where he wants to stay. He asks her if there are other children there. She says Eponine and Azelma, who have beautiful dolls and play all day, while she must work. They walk through the town's shop stalls, and Cosette says they are set up for Christmas. As they reach the house, Cosette asks for her bucket back. If Madame Thenardier sees that someone has carried it for her, she will beat her.

In this scene, we as readers are introduced to the "man" as the stranger encountered by Cosette. This defamiliarizing device underlines Cosette's innocence and emphasizes how remarkable it is that she immediately trusts this stranger—quite possibly because he's the first person who has taken a physical burden off her shoulders, and shown her kindness in a way "Madame" and her family have not.

Chapter 8 Madame Thenardier opens the door and says Cosette has taken her time fetching the water, but as soon as Cosette introduces the man as someone who wants lodging, Madame becomes friendly. But then she notices the threadbare coat, and says there's no room. He asks only for an attic, and she charges him double—40 sous, since, as her husband says, it "ruins" houses to have such people in it.

The different ways that Madame Thenardier treats people depending on who they are and what they can do for her is portrayed as the height of hypocrisy. The narrator also disapprovingly describes the couple's eagerness to take advantage of the poor by overcharging them.

The man sits to drink, and observes the child, whose ugliness stems only from her misery. Her skin is covered with bruises and her legs are thin and red. She seems defined by fear. She's never known how to pray, since Thenardier says he doesn't have time for church. Madame Thenardier asks Cosette where the bread is: she's forgotten about it, but says the baker's shop was closed. When Madame demands the 15-sou piece, Cosette reaches into her pocket but can't find it. Madame screeches that she's robbed her, and gets her whip, as Cosette curls up into a ball. At once, the man says he's found it on the floor. It's 20 sous rather than 15, but Madame thinks this is to her advantage.

Once again, beauty is tied to goodness and its opposite to moral ill. Here, the evil of Cosette's ugliness is not her own but rather the evil ways of her adopted "family." The very first observation that the traveling stranger can make is the harshness and suspicion with which Madame Thenardier treats Cosette, suspecting her of the theft of a small coin and assuming that the little girl is somehow cheating her out of what she deserves.

Eponine and Azelma enter: they are both very pretty and healthy-looking. They go off to play with their dolls in a corner, as Cosette watches them sadly. Madame Thenardier sees that she's distracted, and threatens the whip again, before the stranger asks Madame to let her play. Madame looks at him scornfully—he's barely spent any money there—and says she must work in order to eat. He asks Cosette what she's doing: she's making stockings, which will be worth at least 30 sous. He offers to pay 5 francs for them: he sets the coins down, and then tells the child to play.

The beauty of Eponine and Azelma reflects that these small children, unlike Cosette, are well-loved and well-treated by their parents. Again, Madame Thenardier treats people only as well as she thinks they deserve, or rather as she thinks they can benefit her and her husband. Judging the traveling stranger by his threadbare costume, she assumes, wrongly, that he is poor.

Thenardier and his wife whisper to each other about whether the man is in fact a hidden millionaire. The two daughters have seized the cat and are pretending it's a baby, while the inn guests have begun to sing an obscene song. Cosette, meanwhile, plays with a little lead knife, pretending it's a doll, as girls instinctively take care of imaginary things.

Suddenly, it turns out that the Thenardiers' original judgment of the stranger may have been mistaken, and this transforms their attitude towards him. They now see him as someone whom they might be able to swindle out of some money.

Madame Thenardier tells the stranger that Cosette is a little beggar whom they've taken in through charity. They haven't been paid for 6 months, and it seems the mother is dead. Cosette catches a few words of this. Eponine and Azelma have abandoned their doll for the cat, and Cosette goes up to it and holds it adoringly. Then Eponine notices, and yells for her mother, who screams at Cosette for daring to touch the children's doll with her dirty hands. Cosette begins to sob, and the man steps out from the room. He reenters with the beautiful doll that Cosette had stared at in the window. Everyone in the room stops what they're doing and is silent. Thenardier whispers to his wife that the doll costs at least thirty francs, and he tells Cosette sweetly to take the doll. She doesn't dare at first. The stranger's eyes seem to be filled with tears, and he nods at her as he gives her the doll.

Madame Thenardier shows her hypocrisy yet again through her syrupy, newly gracious words to the stranger, claiming for herself the moral high ground of taking in an orphan. That Madame can switch instantly from smarmy whining to raging anger just goes to show how insincere she is—especially in that she screams at Cosette right after having boasted about her kindness towards the girl. In the midst of this uproar, the man—who has remained largely silent all along—finally betrays his sympathies (and confirms for the Thenardiers his great wealth) by buying an extravagant doll for Cosette.

Madame Thenardier Thenardier despises the man at this moment, but tries to be cordial as her husband seems to want. She sends the children to bed, and rages to herself about this man's inexplicable generosity, though Thenardier doesn't care what a man with money does. Late at night, he leads the stranger to the nicest room in the inn, though the man says he would have liked the stable just as well. After saying goodnight, the man creeps out of his room and up to Cosette's cupboard under the attic. He then looks into the other children's room and sees their shoes placed on the hearth, where the "fairy" has placed a 10-sou piece in each of them. Cosette has set her shoe in the corner. He places a coin in it and returns to his room.

For Madame Thenardier, anyone who both challenges her authority and acts against the interest of her own daughters is to be despised. Thenardier, meanwhile, couldn't care less about his daughters (this reminds us that he is even more coldhearted than his wife), and continues to preoccupy himself with how he'll benefit from the stranger's generosity. Meanwhile, the stranger continues to correct small injustices done against Cosette, here by giving her first Christmas present.

Chapter 9 The next morning, Thenardier makes up a bill for 23 francs, fabricating all kinds of charges. His wife exclaims at the price, but he says the man will pay. The traveler enters the room, and asks if business is good in town. Madame Thenardier remarks drearily that times are difficult, and the child Cosette is incredibly expensive. The traveler offers to take her away himself. He raises his eyebrows at the price, but immediately Thenardier comes into the room and says there's been a mistake: it's only 26 sous.

Twenty-three francs is many times more than a regular customer would pay—Thenardier is attempting to take advantage of the stranger's wealth, and Madame Thenardier, though she doesn't have the initiative to concoct these schemes herself, goes along unthinkingly with whatever her husband tells her to do.

Thenardier asks his wife to leave the room, and, pulling up a chair, confides to the stranger that he adores the child, and he could not possibly think of abandoning her to a stranger. He must see the stranger's passport and be able to go see Cosette once in a while. The stranger refuses, saying he must break the thread definitively. Thenardier recognizes he's dealing with a strong personality. He is struggling to figure out why the man is so interested in Cosette. Finally, he demands 1500 francs. The stranger puts the bills on the table, and tells him to fetch Cosette.

Thenardier has discarded one money-making scheme for another, apparently deciding that he would be able to wring more out of the stranger by pretending to adore Cosette—a ruse that, he's perfectly aware, the stranger need not believe for it to work. Failing to learn more about the stranger (and thus gain greater leverage in wringing more money out of him), Thenardier finally gives up and simply asks for it.

Cosette had awoken stunned by the presence of the gold piece, which she's never seen before, in her shoe. She goes about her morning errands in a kind of haze, when Madame Thenardier approaches her and tells her, almost gently, to follow her. The traveler gives her a proper outfit for an eight-year-old. She changes, and the pair sets off in the direction of Paris. Cosette continues to gaze sidelong at the man beside her, feeling as though she's standing next to God.

For Cosette, the affair of the traveling stranger is mind-boggling: in an instant, her entire world seems to shift on its axis, and suddenly she can leave the nightmare of her childhood at the Thenardiers' behind. Her association of the man with God underlines his merciful, kind, and non-judgmental nature.

Chapter 10 After their departure, Thenardier shows his wife the 1500 francs. She exclaims, "Is that all?" and he says she's right—he runs out of the house in haste. He rushes in the direction of Livry, finally catching sight of the pair far ahead. He follows close behind, and finally catches up to them as they're resting beside the road. Thenardier rushes up to them and hands the traveler the bills, saying he will take back Cosette. He can only give her to her mother, or to the person who has a note signed from her. The man takes out his wallet, and Thenardier shivers in pleasure: but he draws out a letter written and signed by Fantine. He is shocked, but soon recovers and says that he must be paid for many small expenses.

Here the Thenardiers' greediness allows them to feed off each other, as the husband seems almost to want to impress his wife by wrangling more francs out of the stranger. Thenardier also seizes upon yet another strategy: demand legal proof that the stranger has the right to take Cosette away—proof that Thenardier is confident the man won't have. Thenardier may not be as clever as the stranger, but he's certainly tenacious, as shown by his rapid transition from one trick to another.

The stranger counts up out loud all the bills that Thenardier had sent to Fantine over the years: he says 1500 francs is more than enough. Thenardier, shocked but still determined, says he must have 1,000 crowns. The man tells Cosette to follow him, and picks up his cudgel. Thenardier notes how large it is, and how empty and silent the space is. But he continues to follow the pair from afar, until they reach a thick forest, and he finally gives up.

Again, Thenardier had counted on an unequal amount of knowledge between himself and the stranger, and again he turns out to be wrong. His demands grow increasingly desperate, and finally it is only the threat of physical harm (the narrator thus suggesting Thenardier's cowardice) that makes him slink away.

Chapter 11 As we have seen, Valjean had not drowned by the ship at Orion, but had swum underwater until reaching a boat at anchor, where he had hidden before swimming off again to Cape Brun. He crept towards the Hautes-Alpes, then to the Pyrenees, Paris, and finally Montfermeil. He is relieved to find in a newspaper that he is believed to be dead. With Cosette, he returns to Paris and walks along the Boulevard de l'Hopital. Cosette is tired, and he hoists her onto his shoulders; she falls asleep.

Finally, at the end of this section, the narrator reveals what shouldn't be a secret to the reader: the identity of the stranger. With the Montfermeil interlude, we have now been introduced to him just as Cosette was. This temporary anonymity further underlines Valjean's multiple identities, even while drawing a thread through the various parts of his past.

VOLUME 2, BOOK 4: THE GORBEAU HOVEL

Chapter 1 The area of Paris by the Salpetrière is not quite the country, since there are many passers-by, but no longer the city, since the streets are overgrown with grass. It is a wild section of Paris, called the neighborhood of Marche-aux-Chevaux. Near the Rue des Vignes-Saint-Marcel, next to a factory and between two garden walls, is a small hatched hovel one story high. The door is made of worm-eaten planks, and the windowpanes are cracked, but there's an honest air about the place. The house is known in the area as the Gorbeau house, from a man initially named Corbeau (raven), but whom the king had allowed to change his name to prevent mockery. Opposite the house is a street that leads to the city wall (no longer in existence at the time of writing). The area is dim and unpleasant: not a hell where one suffers, but a hell where one is bored. At twilight the boulevard becomes sinister and frightening, though. The area is quickly changing, the old buildings crumbling and new ones being erected. Not until 1845, when black smoke began to be seen in the area, will civilization really arrive in the neighborhood.

While Paris has played a small part in the novel up to this point (it's where Valjean had made a brief stop, and where Fantine had spent her love affair with Tholomyes), only now does the narrator bring the reader into the city with a lush, evocative description—not of the historic monuments and famous boulevards, but rather of a small, apparently insignificant section of the city. Located somewhere between the urban and the rural, the Gorbeau hovel occupies a borderland in other ways too, as its inhabitants are largely ignored by the bustling, thriving city further towards the center. The narrator seems to suggest that it's important to preserve such neighborhoods in prose, even if they're wild and poor, since Paris has changed so much since the setting of the novel.

Chapter 2 Valjean stops in front of the Gorbeau house, takes a key, and opens the door, climbing a staircase to a moderately sized attic. He lays Cosette on the bed and kisses her hand, as he'd kissed her mother's hand nine months before. The next morning she awakens with a start, saying she's ready to work, but then sees Valjean and remembers she has a new life. Valjean tells her to play with her doll all day.

Into this intensely detailed scene enter Valjean and Cosette, both characters that have been forced to live on the margins or borders of society—just as their neighborhood is on the margins of Paris proper. The narrator stresses Valjean's continued kindness.

Chapter 3 For 25 years Valjean has not loved anything. Only at the age of 55 does love enter his life. Cosette changes as a result of his love. She does not remember her mother, and though she had tried to love, all the Thenardiers had repulsed her. Destiny fills in the gulf of age between Valjean and Cosette.

The narrator emphasizes how much love and compassion can actually change someone's nature—a claim that challenges the idea that all people are born with a certain character.

The two live in the attic alone, except for an old housekeeper who is lodged on the first floor. Before he had gone to Montfermeil, he had told her he was a gentleman ruined by Spanish bonds. Valjean teaches Cosette to read, sometimes recalling how he had taught himself to read in prison in order to do evil. He teaches her to pray, and tells her about her mother.

As usual, it's impossible for Valjean to entirely conceal himself from all of society, but he covers his tracks as best he can. Teaching Cosette to read gives him another opportunity to reflect on his slow, painful path from crime to redemption.

Until now, Valjean has been mainly acquainted with the malice and misery of society: the fate of women through Fantine, and public authority through Javert. He had attempted to repress any new bitterness at being returned to prison, but if not for Cosette, he may have grown discouraged and fallen once more.

In the novel, characters like Fantine and Javert have often represented problems in society. Cosette is another example, standing in for the misery that specifically affects children.

Chapter 4 Valjean never goes out by day; at night he goes to church. He dresses poorly, but whenever someone asks for alms, he gives money. Thus he begins to be known as the beggar who gives alms. The housekeeper, a gossip, spies on Valjean one day, and sees him draw out a 1,000-franc bill from the lining of one of his coat skirts. She flees in alarm. A moment later, Valjean approaches the woman and tells her to exchange the bill, which is the quarterly income he's just received. It's too late at night for him to have just received a check. The housekeeper spreads her concerns among the others in the neighborhood.

Hugo is concerned with the harmful, insidious results of gossip. Gossip had been the initial trigger for Fantine's dismissal, which then led to all of her other miseries and death. Here, gossip about money threatens to unravel the carefully constructed persona and life of Valjean and Cosette. Ironically, it's fed in particular by his generosity, which can be contrasted to the skeptical, over-curious attention of others.

Chapter 5 Valjean often gives some money to a poor man by a well near Saint-Medard's church, a man whom some say is actually a policeman in disguise. One evening he's approaching the beggar, who raises his head, and Valjean feels panicked: he thinks he's seen Javert's face. The next day he returns to speak to the man: he is certainly not Javert, and Valjean feels relieved. A few nights later, in the attic, Valjean hears the door downstairs open and shut. He sends Cosette to bed and remains silent. He sees a light through the keyhole, and realizes someone is there listening. A few moments later, the person retreats.

Is Valjean's past finally behind him, and is he simply being paranoid? It's difficult to tell at this point—after all, Valjean had confirmed that he is believed dead, and his death had even been printed in the newspapers. But Paris is notable, at least in the novel, for being both a huge, thriving city and, ultimately, a very small world, so Valjean worries that his past may have caught up with him once again.

At daybreak, Valjean hears a noise again, and looks through the keyhole. He sees a man, who passes in front of Valjean's room: it's Javert. The next morning, the housekeeper tells him that a new lodger has entered the house. That night, Valjean looks out onto the boulevard. Seeing no one, he tells Cosette to accompany him out.

Valjean's fears are confirmed, though it's impossible for him to know how Javert tracked him down. Javert clearly retains some doubts, however, or else he would arrest Valjean on the spot.

VOLUME 2, BOOK 5: FOR A BLACK HUNT, A MUTE PACK

Chapter 1 The narrator notes that he has been absent from Paris for many years, though he adores the city, and in those years it has been transformed. He asks permission to speak about this old Paris of his youth as though it still existed, for, he says, you are indifferent to your native city as long as you are no longer there, but as soon as you are forced to leave its details become precious.

Hugo, in fact, wrote Les Misérables *while in exile, so here narrator and author merge (as they do at other times). He suggests another reason for describing the setting in such detail: not only to preserve historical particularity, but also to preserve Paris in his memory.*

Valjean and Cosette move through the streets at night. Cosette asks no questions, having grown used to Valjean's peculiarities. Both of them trust in God. Valjean has no plan, just a suspicion that he shouldn't return to the Gorbeau house. They cross the labyrinthine streets of the Mouffetard quarter. Near 11:00, they reach the Rue Pontoise opposite the police commissary. Valjean sees three policemen pass under the lantern, and he hastily leaves the street, reaching a square where the Rue des Postes, a 13th-century street, begin. He hides in a doorway. At that moment, four policemen with large cudgels in their hands halt in the middle of the square and point in the direction that Valjean had gone. One of them is Javert .

While Valjean and Cosette have remained on the edge of the city, and of society, in the Gorbeau hovel, only now do they penetrate Paris proper. The Mouffetard quarter, on the Left Bank, is one of the oldest parts of Paris and the student neighborhood (home to the Sorbonne, for example). To this day its streets are darker and windier than most of the rest of the city, and are remnants of Paris's medieval past. Here, the benign student quarter is colored with danger, as it appears that the police are on their trail.

Chapter 2 Valjean and Cosette slip away towards the Jardin des Plantes. Valjean begins to carry Cosette. He reaches the Pont D'Austerlitz, a bridge where he must pay 2 sous to cross. Entering a small street, he looks back and sees four shadows enter the bridge.

Paris's bridge toll reminds us that at this time Paris, at least for many people, was the extent of one's travels. In crossing to the Right Bank, Valjean and Cosette enter a totally different world.

Continuing on, Valjean reaches a fork and takes the right path, which leads towards the open country. He arrives at a wall. To the right the road leads to a blind alley, while to the left a more welcoming street beckons. But at the end of that lane he suddenly sees a large black form. At the time of writing there are brand-new, wide streets in Paris but at the time of this tale, the roads are unpaved and winding. All four guards are blocking the possible exits.

Today, the roads leading from the Pont d'Austerlitz are all built-up sections of the city, but at the time of the story, much of today's Paris did not yet exist. In addition, this Paris is characterized by its alleys, walls, and dead ends, complicating Valjean's attempts to escape.

Chapter 4 Valjean looks up at the wall and realizes that he might be saved if he can get on the other side of it. On the side of the Rue Droit-Mur, there are a number of pipes on the walls, but Valjean doesn't see how he can hoist Cosette up in addition to himself. There are two locked doors abutting one of the walls, and he cannot force either of them.

As seen from his action on the ship Orion *(as well as his four escapes from the galleys), Valjean is quite adept at the getaway. Here, however, his concern for Cosette requires him to find a new path, or else sacrifice himself, since he won't leave her.*

Chapter 5 Valjean glances around the corner and sees 7 or 8 soldiers advancing behind Javert. From his time as a convict, Valjean had learned to mount walls and climb obstacles—a skill he prefers not to use as an honest man. But he's desperate. Suddenly he sees a rope attached to a gas-lantern, and rushes to fetch it. Cosette says she is afraid, but he tells her to be quiet: he says it's Madame Thenardier. He fastens the rope to Cosette, climbs up the wall himself, and then hoists her up the wall. As they duck under a linden tree, he hears Javert's voice from below telling the soldiers to search the alleys.

It appears that Valjean never entirely lacked an escape route. This recalls the scene in which he saved Fauchelevent by lifting up the carriage. Both then and now, Valjean has been wary of using what he learned as a convict and criminal, however, in both cases, he ultimately chooses to use this skill (just as he utilized his literacy, learned in jail, to teach Cosette to read) in order to save both her and himself.

Chapter 6 The two find themselves in a vast garden beside a building in a sort of ruin at the corner of the Rue Droit-Mur and Rue Petit-Picpus. It is wild and solitary. Valjean leads Cosette into the garden shed. Suddenly he hears women's voices singing a hymn. Both of them feel a need to kneel in awe. They enter a garden shed, and Valjean puts Cosette to sleep.

Until now, the narrator has led us through a Paris that corresponds to real-life, historical Paris, but now the narrator introduces two imaginary streets, and we find ourselves in a city somewhere between fact and fiction.

Chapter 7 In the middle of the night, Cosette awakens, shivering. Valjean wraps his coat around her and slips outside. He creeps along the large building and peeks in through the windows, where he sees a vast hall; a human form is lying on the ground, covered in a sheet. Sweating and breathing heavily, Valjean continues to stare at the form, transfixed, not knowing if it's dead or alive, and confused as to the nature of the place. He flees back to the shed.

Having essentially fallen from the sky, Valjean and Cosette now find themselves in a new, unknown part of Paris, whose mysteries Valjean has yet to probe. The human form covered by a sheet suggests a dead body. This gives Valjean a concrete form on which to focus in his continued fear and insecurity.

Chapter 8 As Valjean watches Cosette sleep, he feels calmer. But then he looks out and sees someone in the garden. He picks up Cosette and hides her behind a heap of old furniture. When he touches her hands they're icy cold; she's pale. He rushes back out, vowing he'll find her a bed and fire within the hour.

Having done his utmost to protect Cosette, even at a risk to himself, Valjean now finds himself facing another threat, one he can only resolve by figuring out where he's arrived.

Chapter 9 Valjean walks up to the man he had seen in the garden, and cries out, "100 francs!", the amount he'll pay for shelter. The man cries out that it's Father Madeleine. He removes his cap, trembling, and remarks on Valjean's wretched state. He turns to the light, and Valjean recognizes Fauchelevent. He had come out to cover his melons from the cold, he says. He wears a bell on his knee so that he might be avoided, since there are only women in this house: it is the Petit-Picpus convent, where Fauchelevent, crippled by the fall from his cart, had entered to work two years earlier. Valjean asks if Fauchelevent could save his life, as he once saved Fauchelevent's. Fauchelevent says it would be a blessing. Valjean asks him not to tell anyone about him, and asks him to lodge him and Cosette in his hut behind the convent.

This scene reflects Hugo's penchant for the almost unbelievable coincidence, but it also underlines a recurring theme in the novel: the question of the possibility of redemption, which is linked to the constant intrusion of each character's past into the present. While this intermingling has haunted Valjean before, here the narrator presents a distinct way in which the past can redeem, rather than betray, the present. Valjean, as Madeleine, had saved Fauchelevent's life, giving the man a chance to now repay the favor. Valjean's good deeds linger just as much as his crimes do.

A few minutes later, Cosette is lying asleep in the gardener's bed, and Fauchelevent remarks that it is bad that Valjean forgets those whose lives he saves.

Fauchelevent's remark is good-humored rather than accusatory, as he too reflects on the coincidence.

Chapter 10 The narrator explains things from Javert's perspective. When Valjean had escaped from the town jail, the police assumed he went to Paris. Javert had gone there immediately, and had proved central to Valjean's recapture. In December 1823, he saw news of Valjean's death in the newspaper. But not long afterwards, he saw a police report about the abduction of a child in Montfermeil: a small child named Cosette, the daughter of a woman named Fantine, had been stolen away by a stranger. Javert recognized the name Fantine, and remembered that Valjean was going to Montfermeil when he was arrested.

Valjean had slowly come to suspect Javert before, and then was suddenly pursued by him across the city—but this gave him no time to understand how or why Javert wanted to pursue him. Javert, the narrator makes clear, is clever, and not a brute like Thenardier. Javert knows how to piece together elements of other characters' (other potential prisoners') pasts to be able to track them down.

Javert had then gone to Montfermeil, where multiple people told him different versions of the tale. But Thenardier, whom he questioned, realized it is never smart to stir up a prosecutor's interest, so he refused to speak anymore about the subject. Thenardier just told Javert that Cosette's "grandfather," Guillaume Lambert, had taken her away. Javert returned to Paris, convinced Valjean was really dead.

As with the tale of Boulatruelle, fact and rumor meld together so that it grows difficult to distinguish them. Still, rather than speaking out directly against Valjean (the "stranger"), Thenardier is eager to protect himself as much as possible, even if it means giving up the chance to betray the traveler.

However, in March 1824 he heard about the "beggar who gives alms" in Paris, a man who had come from Montfermeil. Javert dressed up as a beggar, and believed he recognized Valjean when he stooped to give him money. But Valjean was supposedly dead. After Valjean and Cosette had fled, Javert asked for backup, without explaining his suspicions. At the time, the police had a reputation of interfering with individual liberty: he didn't want to make a mistake. He was sure that this time Valjean wouldn't escape.

The narrator reveals definitively that Valjean wasn't just being paranoid—here, ironically, it's a benign aspect of his past (his penchant for giving alms and charity as mayor of M.-sur-M.) rather than his earlier life as a convict that returns to potentially challenge Valjean's ability to make a new life with Cosette, and fully redeem himself for good.


Still, it was only in the Rue Pontoise that Javert positively recognized Valjean, thanks to a **lamplight**. He then asked for more reinforcements and followed the pair across the bridge, surrounding him around the Rue Petit-Picpus like a spider surrounds its prey. When he failed to find Valjean at the center of his web, Javert was enraged with himself for being too cautious. He returned to the police prefecture, his pride wounded.

Light, in Hugo's formulation, doesn't lie, but here, interestingly, the truth it reveals is manipulated for ill by Javert, in his identification and subsequent pursuit of Valjean. Increasingly, Javert's pursuit is becoming a matter of ego (see his wounded pride) rather than a nobler pursuit of justice.

VOLUME 2, BOOK 6: LE PETIT-PICPUS

Chapter 1 Number 62 on the Rue Petit-Picpus resembles every other door, but it is gloomy on the inside, with bare walls and severe furnishings. If one rings the bell, a woman's voice asks for the password to enter, and with the correct word one enters into a small kind of theater-box across from a barrier of black shutters. A voice emerges from the other side. It belongs to the porter of a cloister, the Convent of the Bernardines of the Perpetual Adoration. It is a strictly walled convent, one which only the narrator has access to on behalf of the reader.

Now that Valjean has learned where he and Cosette are—a convent and boarding school—the narrator takes the opportunity to expound in greater detail on the nature of this new, even if temporary, home. The narrator notes that he has privileged access to this small, contained world, just suggesting how many secrets might lie behind the many walls of Paris.

Chapter 2 The Bernardines have orders all throughout Europe, and are one of the strictest orders of nuns. They are clothed in black and fast all year round, abstaining from meat, chanting from one to three in the morning, never lighting fires, and swearing obedience, poverty, and chastity. The priest is always hidden from view: the women are forbidden from interacting with men. Each woman takes turn making "reparation," prayers for all sins committed on earth, by praying all day with a rope around her neck. They possess nothing of their own, calling everything "ours." None has any privacy, and each confesses aloud in front of the others each week. In five years, three of them have gone mad.

The narrator launches into a litany of the privations suffered (though voluntarily) by the nuns in the Petit-Picpus convent. This is a different kind of religion than the one embodied by the Bishop of D---, for instance, which had embraced and participated in the world outside rather than barring itself from that world. Still, the convent constitutes a kind of universe itself, one that replaces the individualistic (and capitalistic) world of modern Paris with a communal, sacrificial ethos.

Chapter 3 A boarding-school is attached to the convent. It teaches girls to be terrified of the world outside. They are only permitted to see their relatives in the parlor, and are forbidden from embracing them.

Not only do the members of the religious order bar themselves from the world, but they teach others to do so too, underlining their anti-modern philosophy.

Chapter 4 Nevertheless, the youthfulness of the girls gives the convent greater joy and charm. They compose poems and tell silly stories, and they name the rooms of the convent things like Spider Corner and Cricket Corner. For certain holy processions, there is a distinction made between "virgins" and "florists," and the little girls can be heard asking each other, "Who is a virgin?"

The narrator suggests that despite the strict requirements imposed on the girls by the adult nuns, there is a joy in childhood that cannot help but slip through—just as Cosette made a doll out of a knife when she lacked anything else.

Chapter 5 In the refectory there's a prayer on the wall saying that the girls should repeat the Passion of Christ three times before bed each night. The meals are plain and the children are required to eat in silence. Anyone who disobeys must lick the ground in penance. Still, some of the outside world's passions do enter. There is one woman, Madame Albertine, who is not a nun but treated with great respect. She is quiet, cold, and spectral, and the students all wonder what is her story. One day a young priest, Le Duc de Rohan, was giving the sermon, and when she saw him, she rose and said "Ah! Auguste," before sighing and becoming an emotionless corpse once again. The event fed directly into the girls' imaginations.

These descriptions have the effect of allowing the reader to visualize not just a static portrait, but a dynamic scene in action of daily life within the convent, complete with details like the punishment of licking the ground. The universe of the convent includes its own gossip and intrigues, as much as the sisters might want to deny them, suggesting that the external world (and the past of the convent's inhabitants) does manage to intrude at some points.

Chapter 6 In the Petit-Picpus there is the Great Convent where the nuns live, the Boarding-school, and the Little Convent, where nuns of other orders, who had been exiled during the Empire, had come to live. Some old society women also retire there. The public is only admitted to the church, but the members of the cloister never see a face from the outside world.

The narrator maps out a topography of the convent into which Valjean and Cosette have fallen, and finishes describing its inhabitants—stressing once again the sharp divide (even if some porousness does exist) between it and the world outside.

Chapter 7 From 1819 to 1825, the prioress is Mademoiselle de Blemeur, or Mother Innocente. She is around 60 years old, short, and the only merry woman in the convent. The narrator lists the dozen or so other most esteemed sisters. All the women, severe to themselves, are gentle towards the children and care deeply about them. It is for this reason that the only men they are allowed to see are old and ugly.

After recounting in detail just how strict and un-merry the life of the convent is, the narrator turns to suggesting that the women manage to show kindness and compassion in their own way (even if this means barring them from seeing men and thus being "tempted" by them).


Chapter 8 The convent is composed of several buildings and a garden, and is enclosed between the Rue Droit-Mur, Rue Petit-Picpus, Rue Polonceau, and the closed lane Aumarais. Bushes line the walls, separating the convent from these streets, which are some of the most ancient in Paris.

This geography is invented by Hugo, as he creates a parallel but imaginary Paris with its own ancient streets, bushes and walls, and lanes—a geography that will define the characters' relationship to the city.

Chapter 9 The narrator asks permission for one other digression about the character of the cloister. In the Little Convent is a centenarian who had been in society before the Revolution. The girls tend to laugh at her Picard accent, but also listen enraptured to her stories about provincial customs. She keeps one mysterious treasure, which she hastily locks up if she hears footsteps in the corridor. When she dies, the women rush to her cupboard. They find a Faenza platter representing little gods of Love flying away, pursued by boys with enormous syringes. The "moral" is "Love conquered by the colic."

This lighthearted anecdote serves to make yet another contrast between the convent and the world outside, while simultaneously challenging this division and suggesting that the nuns' pasts can never be entirely done away with. The centenarian from a far-away province is shown to have had her own dramas, love affairs, and small triumphs and sorrows, and the narrator suggests we respect this history.

Chapter 10 The convent's dark, sepulchral parlor is far more severe than that of others, such as the garden of the Rue du Temple convent, with its famous ancient chestnut tree. The Benedictines split in the 17th century, with the Petit-Picpus convent established by those who wanted to follow a stricter order.

By contrasting a physical description of the Petit-Picpus convent's parlors with another Parisian convent's courtyard entrance, the narrator fleshes out his characterization of Petit-Picpus as a place with stricter, more rigid laws.

Chapter 11 At the beginning of the Restoration, the Petit-Picpus convent is beginning to decay, like many other religious orders. The narrator notes that contemplation and prayer are necessary to humanity, but the Revolution will ultimately transform them so that they're amenable to human progress. By 1840, the school will have disappeared, the nuns dwindling from 100 to around 28. The narrator has dwelt upon this convent, he says, in respect even without understanding, because it is necessary to know and study the past, even if only to turn away from it.

The narrator has already called attention to the vast changes that have taken place in Paris between the time of the narrative and of the novel's composition, usually in a tone of nostalgia. Here, however, he suggests that change can be positive and can contribute to progress. Still, he underlines the importance of knowledge and studying the past even if it is somewhat unpleasant, to inform and change the present.

VOLUME 2, BOOK 7: PARENTHESIS

Chapter 1 The protagonists of this book are the Infinite and Man, the narrator says. He has had to enter the convent along the road of the narrative, since the convent has long been one of the ways by which Man attempts to perceive the Infinite. There is both a hideous and sublime side to this contemplation.

The narrator now begins to elaborate on the idea with which he had ended the previous Book: the need to examine even less attractive elements in the past to figure out how humans understand themselves and their world.

Chapter 2 History and reason condemn monasticism, which leads to idleness rather than labor, selfishly guarding prosperity rather than seeking to sow it everywhere. Cloisters may have been useful early in civilization, but they are now harmful to its growth. The Catholic cloister is a place of severity close to death, especially in Spain, where they have frayed women's nerves. Life cannot be found in these places.

The narrator positions himself firmly against monasticism, or the shutting away of religious figures in a monastery or convent so that they do not interact with members of the outside world. At the same time he suggests a dynamic view of history, in which some values increase or decrease with time.

Chapter 3 The forced vocations and violent judgment of convents have created a sort of bombardment of living souls. Nevertheless, now in the 19th century there seems to be a renewed interest in asceticism, which the narrator cautions against. The past should remain the past, to be respected, but not resurrected from the dead. Now it is necessary to destroy monasticism in order to promote progress.

In the previous section, the narrator had described the sterile physical nature of the convent in detail. Now he links that description with the emotional and intellectual deadness of such places—places which, he again stresses, may have once been useful, but are no longer.

Chapter 4 In an "ideal" convent, people enter in order to create an association of equality, join a spiritual family, and care for the poor. Equality and fraternity are to be admired. But the narrator also wants to turn to a convent's true goal: religious piety.

The narrator acknowledges the impeccable morals of the ideal convent, but then goes on to suggest that these cannot be a defense for the convent's real (to him mistaken) goal.

Chapter 5 The narrator asks a series of rhetorical questions about the existence of the infinite, contrasting infinite essence and intelligence to mere relative, human existence. There is an infinite without us and within us, he claims, and to pray is to combine these two infinites, allowing men to search for the unknown, embracing mystery rather than fanaticism, belief beyond simple religious superstitions.

For Hugo, the existence of God is a given, not to be questioned, and a clear contrast to the contingencies of human existence. But he wants us to think about what the relationship between the infinite and the relative means in our own lives, so that they no longer remain separate.

Chapter 6 The narrator dismisses materialist philosophy, which can lead only to nihilism, in which the speaker doubts even his own existence, and so nothing has any purpose at all. Philosophy should be a positive energy, leading from contemplation into action, supporting progress towards an ideal, or God.

Here the narrator turns from his main argument to place himself squarely against a popular philosophy of the time—an atheist philosophy focused on the physical rather than the spiritual world.

Chapter 7 A convent is a contradiction, the narrator says, since it seeks suffering in order to attain ultimately mastery in the eternal world.

The narrator suggests, against some other Christian thinkers, that suffering is not necessarily to be actively sought out for salvation.

Chapter 8 The narrator salutes the praying man, but not the church full of intrigues and judgment. One must believe something, and meditate on infinite mysteries: the narrator is "for religion as against religions." Even though the monastery wrongly directs sacrifice, it still is sacrifice, so there's a certain grandeur to it. The narrator, then, finishes by respecting what the women in convents believe, even though he does not share their beliefs.

Just as the narrator had contrasted the Bishop of D--- to worldly, greedy official church figures, here he emphasizes the importance of individual, spiritual connection to God rather than the official religious institutions that attempt to secure a monopoly over this kind of relationship.

VOLUME 2, BOOK 8: CEMETERIES TAKE THAT WHICH IS COMMITTED THEM

Chapter 1 Valjean had "fallen from the sky" into this convent. Failing to sleep, he thinks about his next steps: he cannot return to Paris at large. Meanwhile, Fauchelevent doesn't sleep either, asking himself how Valjean scaled the walls, and who the child is. He'd heard nothing about Madeleine's later fate, and he assumes he's become bankrupt. He asks himself if he would still save him if Valjean was an assassin, and he decides he would.

The narrator finally returns to the main plot, even as the previous books are meant to provoke our comparison with Valjean's own situation and history. Fauchelevent is forced to ask himself some difficult questions, and ultimately decides that since Madeleine saved his life, few things will challenge his loyalty.

Fauchelevent stays up all night thinking about how he'll keep Madeleine in the convent. In the morning, he says the two must not leave the room. One of the nuns is dying, he says, so the community is in confusion. As he speaks, a bell tolls and Fauchelevent says that the nun is dead. He cautions Valjean that the girls in the school must not see him, or they'll shriek at the presence of a man. In order to return here safely, he says, Valjean and Cosette must first leave—the nuns will not accepting him "falling from the sky." Fauchelevent can easily go out with Cosette in his basket, who can stay with his friend for the night. Valjean's case will be more complicated.

Here, the peculiar history and rules of the convent come to bear on the specific situation of Valjean and Cosette, but Fauchelevent is able to negotiate these requirements with greater familiarity. While Fauchelevent has "accepted" Valjean and Cosette apparently falling from the sky, he knows that in order to save them and return Valjean's favor, he'll need to construct some kind of subterfuge to make sure they're allowed to stay.

Fauchelevent says that part of his duty is to nail up the coffin once a nun has died, before the undertakers fetch the coffin and bring it to the cemetery. A few peals of the bell mean that the prioress is calling for Fauchelevent, and he hurries out.

Fauchelevent leaves Valjean without either of them having settled upon a plan to sneak Valjean out of the convent (another kind of escape that recalls Valjean's earlier ones).

Chapter 2 Fauchelevent, trembling, asks to make a request to the prioress. In his two years, he had learned much about the daily workings of the convent, but had largely kept quiet and didn't abuse his knowledge. He begins to talk about his age and infirmities, finally saying that he has a brother, who might be permitted to come live with and help him, while his daughter might be able to attend school and become a nun someday. The prioress leaves him to speak with the other mothers.

Fauchelevent is clearly not as arrogant or as smooth a talker as Thenardier, for instance, and he struggles to ask for a favor from the head of the entire convent. But he's committed to saving Valjean's life just like Valjean did for him. He even goes so far as to suggest that Cosette might be folded into the convent's activities and training herself.

Chapter 3 The prioress returns, and begins telling Fauchelevent about the holiness of the nun, Mother Crucifixion, who has just died. Her last wish was to be buried in the vault under the altar. This is a forbidden task, but the prioress says that it's forbidden by men, not God, and she cites a number of cases in which this kind of burial was allowed. Finally, Fauchelevent, who has been uneasy at this speech, says he will obey. He must do it in absolute secrecy that night. The prioress asks what is to be done with the coffin, since the undertakers must not know that there is no one in it. He says he will pile earth into it. The prioress says she is pleased with him, and asks him to fetch his brother and his daughter the next day.

The prioress' change of topic initially seems to be a non sequitur, but soon it becomes clear that she's looking for a favor of her own in return. Just as Fauchelevent is wary of asking too much from the prioress, he is not eager to flout the standards that he's spent two years learning, for he has accepted the convent's regulations as holy and necessary. The narrator thus obliquely suggests the possible hypocrisy of the convent's inhabitants, even while showing how Fauchelevent can benefit from it.

Chapter 4 As Fauchelevent enters his room, Valjean is explaining to Cosette how to hide and be silent in the basket. Fauchelevent frets about how to get Valjean out, and then, sitting down, mutters to himself about his other task: how putting earth in the coffin won't do, since it will move around. He explains his task to Valjean, and Valjean says he should put another body in the coffin—his own. Fauchelevent springs up from his chair, stunned at the idea. Valjean asks for a few details about the coffin, determining how he could sneak into the "dead-room" that night until the hearse comes for the coffin tomorrow.

While kindhearted and well-intentioned, Fauchelevent lacks the plotter's wit and scheming mind, which is something that also might be able to characterize the criminal. Valjean, though he's attempted to rid himself of this mentality, hasn't succeeded, and here he once again draws upon these remnants of his past in order to attempt to achieve a new life for himself and for Cosette.

Valjean is far more used to escapes like this than Fauchelevent. He's only troubled by what will happen at the cemetery. But Fauchelevent says the grave-digger, Father Mestienne, is a drunkard. He'll suggest Father Mestienne go drink, and Fauchelevent will dig Valjean out. All will go well, says Valjean. If it doesn't, says Fauchelevent, it would be terrible.

The plan elaborated by Valjean and Fauchelevent is, as Hugo humorously has Fauchelevent suggest, far from air-tight. But having already feigned his own death and escaped from his hunters multiple times, Valjean feels himself to be up for the task.

Chapter 5 The next day a hearse travels down the Boulevard de Maine to the Vaugirard cemetery, which has a corner staked out for the nuns. At sundown, the gates swing shut; the only way to get out is through the grave-digger's card, which he drops in the porter's box (or else calls out his name, but pays a fine). After 1830, the Mont-Parnasse cemetery would replace this cemetery. At this point, it's falling into disuse.

Again the narrator calls attention to how much Paris has changed since the time of the novel's setting. One aspect of this past is the odd ritual of the grave-digger's card and the porter (a tradition that nevertheless will be useful for the plot).


The burial of Mother Crucifixion, Cosette's exit, and Valjean's introduction into the dead-room have all gone off with no problem. At the cemetery, Fauchelevent watches a stranger arrive behind the hearse, who says he's the grave-digger. Father Mestienne is dead, he says. Fauchelevent stammers feebly that it isn't possible, but the man simply introduces himself as Gribier. Fauchelevent suggests they get a drink, but Gribier says he never drinks, since he must support his children. As Fauchelevent follows Gribier, he doesn't think of offering to pay for the drink—Mestienne always did so.

It's only at the cemetery itself that the plan painstakingly set out by Valjean and Fauchelevent begins to unravel. This part of the plan had hinged on Father Mestienne's vice, and ironically, it is now the upstanding morality of Father Gribier that might signal the downfall of Valjean. With this the narrator implicitly suggests that some "vices" are far more harmful and nefarious than others—like drinking.

Chapter 6 Meanwhile, Valjean is following along silently in the coffin, until he feels hands seize it and lower it down into the hole. A voice pronounces Latin words above him, and then he hears something like retreating footsteps. Suddenly, he begins to hear shovelfuls of earth begin to fall. He passes out.

Suddenly the pretend burial—so carefully plotted out by Fauchelevent and Valjean—is replaced by an unnerving reality, seeming to fulfill in a terrifying way the death feigned by Valjean earlier.

Chapter 7 As Fauchelevent had seen the gravedigger grasp the shovel, he had finally offered to pay for a drink. The gravedigger cursed at him and began to shovel earth onto the coffin. Fauchelevent grabbed his arm and continued to beg him. Gribier finally said he'd do so but only after he finished. Suddenly, Fauchelevent caught a glimpse of the grave-digger's card in Gribier's pocket. He stealthily seized it without Gribier noticing, and then asked if Gribier had his card, as the sun was setting. Realizing he didn't, Gribier turned green, especially as Fauchelevent noted there was a 15-franc fine. Fauchelevent suggested he rush home and get his card, then bury the corpse. Gribier had raced away.

The narrator rewinds temporally. He had described Valjean's experience in a vivid, present-tense depiction, and now fills in the gaps to explain how Valjean had found himself in such a situation. Only after Valjean passes out does Fauchelevent, in desperation, concoct a new plan, taking advantage of Gribier's clearly painstaking, penny-pinching character—and the archaic regulations of old Paris's graveyards—to ensure that Valjean won't be buried alive.

Now Fauchelevent quietly calls to Madeleine, but hears nothing. He seizes his handle and pries open the lid of the coffin, seeing Valjean's pallid face. Believing him dead, Fauchelevent begins to sob, asking Madeleine to forgive him. He bends over the coffin: Valjean's eyes open and look at him. Fauchelevent grows pale with fear and stares back, but then realizes he's alive, and had merely fainted.

This scene depicts a disorienting amalgamation of life and death, acting and reality, as Valjean's fake burial seems to become real, and then his apparent death is replaced by the realization that he is, in fact, alive. Fauchelevent has managed to repay his debt.

The two hurry out of the cemetery. Fauchelevent stops at Gribier's home, a small, wretched garret, to give back his shovel, pick, and card. Gribier thanks him and says next time he'll pay for the drinks.

The narrator moves from a description of terror and uncertainty to a lighthearted tone as the chapter and the scene come to a close.

Chapter 8 Valjean and Cosette arrive at No. 62 Rue Petit-Picpus that night. Cosette, who had been hidden with Fauchelevent's friend, had been terrified all day, but upon seeing Valjean again she grows calm. The prioress waits for them, and Fauchelevent introduces the two as his brother, Ultime, and niece. The prioress says to another nun that Cosette will grow up ugly. She welcomes them inside: plain girls are more likely to want to stay in a convent. The convent is grateful to Fauchelevent, who is known even among the archbishops as an excellent gardener and holy man.

Finally, the complex and nearly failed scheme of Fauchelevent and Valjean yields its ultimate goal of reinserting Valjean and Cosette right back into the place they'd just left. As has happened before at the Thenardiers, Cosette isn't treated by the nun as a full person whose feelings might be bruised, but instead as a possible new enlistment for the convent.

Chapter 9 Cosette begins to settle in happily. The nuns don't notice how only the elder Fauchelevent ever goes outside on errands—not his supposed brother. Valjean lives and works in the old hut at the end of the garden. Cosette may pass one hour with him every day. She begins to laugh and smile for the first time. The convent prevents Valjean from descending back into darkness. It is another place of captivity, but this is imposed while the other voluntarily embraced. In prison, people are bound by chains and in the convent they are chained by faith. Valjean comes to ask himself what sins they are paying for, and concludes that it's the sins of others.

The narrator elaborates on a deeply ambivalent perspective on the convent. By comparing it to a prison, he suggests that it is susceptible to the same kinds of misery and sorrow that a prison's confinement promotes, but he also suggests that voluntary confinement might allow for redemption in a way that enforced confinement cannot. The apparent happiness of Valjean and Cosette underlines this redemptive possibility.

Thinking on the voluntary sequestration of the cloister, Valjean's pride vanishes, and he grows grateful for the opportunity to again try to be good and kind. In this way many years pass.

Valjean himself comes to recognize what the narrator has already pointed out—that the convent might give him a chance to redeem himself.

VOLUME 3, BOOK 1: PARIS STUDIED IN ITS ATOM

Chapter 1 In Paris (the narrator begins a long study of this figure) there is a certain child, a "gamin" (street urchin) of between 7 and 13 years. He is joyful even though he often goes without food, and he knows all the ins and outs of the city. He talks slang and swears like a convict, but has a good, innocent heart.

The narrator begins to undertake another example of "physiognomic" study, this time a study of Paris itself, by examining its types of inhabitants. Here he focuses on the paradoxical character of the street urchin.

Chapter 2 This child belongs to Paris. He is mischievous and delights in the Bohemia of children that is the city. He loves searching for small animals among the cobblestones and tadpoles in the ditches of the Champs-de-Mars. He is jovial and jokey, often exasperating shopkeepers.

The narrator clearly considers the "gamin" sympathetically, as an innocent child whose pastimes lack the cold calculation and scheming attitude of real, older criminals.

Chapter 3 The child usually manages to scrape together a few sous to attend the theater at night, which he adores. He easily fights, sings, and scoffs at anything grave, failing to take anything too seriously.

The gamin is a somewhat contradictory figure, both innocent and clever, scrappy and proud, jovial but eager to defend himself.

Chapter 4 Paris, the narrator says, contains the lounger—a symbol of monarchy—and the gamin—a symbol of anarchy. The gamin is made out of the same clay that made Adam (the Biblical first man), and he is against prejudice, tyranny, oppression, and injustice. But eventually he'll grow up.

The allusion to the first humans being forged out of clay can be paralleled to the narrator's idea of Paris, a city formed and shaped in another way out of the characters and types that inhabit it.

Chapter 5. The gamin loves to roam around and observe Paris's secrets, places like Mont-Parnasse, Mont-Souris, and the Tombe-Issoire, all different corners of Parisian suburbs. These are filled with small children, and constitute their whole universe.

Paris's mysteries are more enticing and exciting to children, who both are better aware of its secrets than adults and are more interested in plumbing those secrets.

Chapter 6 During the time of this book, there are hundreds of stray children in Paris. Though in other cities vagabondage for children leads to crimes as adults, in Paris there is greater purity among these street children. Nevertheless, throughout history street children could be sent to the galleys or carried off by the police to who knows where.

The narrator wants to defend his sympathy towards the street children of Paris by claiming that they aren't sources of crime. Instead he puts the blame on the figures that cart these innocent characters off to jail, where they are more likely to become hardened criminals.


Chapter 7 "Gamins" nearly are a social caste of the city. They are strong-minded on religious themes, always watch executions, consider politicians as assassins, and admire those who are left-handed.

This portrait of the "gamin" refuses to slot the figure under a single political ideology, instead suggesting a unique view on the city.

Chapter 8 In the summer, the gamin swims in the Seine and keeps an eye out for policemen, calling out to warn the others. He loves uproar, but always wants both to overthrow the government and to get his trousers sewn back up.

Here the narrator links the gamin's material and economic concerns with a political sympathy for anarchy, implying that one feeds the other.


Chapter 9 Famous people in French history like Voltaire and Beaumarchais have something of the gamin in them. The gamin is witty and brave: he "amuses himself, because he is unhappy."

By linking well-known French figures to this typology, the narrator elevates the notion of the gamin to literary and historical heights.


Chapter 10 The gamin has much of grace, but also is a kind of social disease that can only be cured by **light**: by education, science, and the arts. The gamin expresses Paris, which expresses the world in its great diversity, including all civilizations within it.

Here the narrator turns from sympathy towards the gamin to a reflection on where the gamin's weaknesses and faults stem from—the gamin can be seen as a symptom of a larger problem.

Chapter 11 Paris has no limit. It is immense because it is daring—to dare, the narrator states, is the price of progress, and accounts for one of humankind's great sources of **light**.

The narrator continues to stress the greatness of Paris despite its crime and misery, suggesting it can draw strength from its contradictions.


Chapter 12 Similarly, to depict a Parisian child is to depict the city in all its types. The narrator beseeches philosophers to spread **light** among this populace and determine what use to make of principles and virtues in bettering the people.

Again, the narrator focuses on contradiction and complication within Paris by exploring the inner complexities of even one small boy within it.

Chapter 13 Eight years have passed since Valjean's arrival to the convent. A little boy of 11 or 12 years of age is known to wander around the Boulevard du Temple, conforming almost exactly to the ideal of the "gamin" sketched above, though with an emptier heart. His parents did not think of or love him, so he simply struck out on his own. Sometimes, though, he returns to see his mother at his family's home—the Gorbeau hovel, where several individuals who don't know each other are lodged. The housekeeper is now named Madame Bourgon, and the most wretched of the inhabitants is a family of father, mother, and two grown daughters. The father's name is Jondrette, and he tells the housekeeper that if anyone should ever inquire for a Pole, Italian, or Spaniard, it is he. When the boy, Little Gavroche, returns home, his mother asks him few questions, though she does love his sisters. The chamber next to the Jondrettes' is occupied by a poor young man named M. Marius.

The narrator returns to the characters and to the plot, situating his description of the gamin within the temporal and geographical range of Valjean's and Cosette's time at the convent. After sketching out a general picture of the gamin, the narrator now applies this sketch to one new character in particular. The Gorbeau hovel returns in this sketch, now as the former home of the gamin and the lodgings of his family, the Jondrettes, as well as the home of a poor man named Marius. That this is the same place where Valjean and Cosette once lived emphasizes the dynamic, changing character of Paris, where people's fates are constantly connected but are also in constant turmoil.


VOLUME 3, BOOK 2: THE GREAT BOURGEOIS

Chapter 1 The narrator fills in the backstory about Marius. In the Rue de Saintonge a few old inhabitants still remember an even older man named M. Gillenormand, an 18th-century bourgeois who is over 90 years old in 1831. He had always had good health, and is passionate and hot-tempered. He has a 50-year-old daughter whom he chastises severely, and his wife is a flirtatious barber-ess. He enjoys discussing how civilization is essentially barbaric.

We move now from the Gorbeau hovel to another street on Paris's Right Bank, plumbing another of the city's secrets and embarking on another physiognomy of one of its inhabitants—this time, as in some other cases, one only tangentially related to Valjean's and Cosette's experience.

Chapter 2 Gillenormand now lives in the Marais, the Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire. In his youth he had been a sullen husband but charming lover, so his wives had cheated on him, but never his mistresses. He follows the fashions, and dismisses the French Revolution.

Gillenormand is portrayed as a political conservative, someone from the old regime who continues to espouse its values rather than embrace progress.


Chapter 3 Sometimes Gillenormand recalls lovers from his youth, and speaks of them crudely.

Gillenormand has an antiquated, even misogynistic idea of love and relationships.

Chapter 4 Gillenormand despises all mention of 1789, and often says he hopes he won't see '93 twice.

As an anti-revolutionary, even the notion of the revolution upsets this reactionary.

Chapter 5 Gillenormand often says that the way to rid oneself of a disagreeable wife is to give her the purse-strings, so she becomes extremely busy and no longer bothers him. He had done just this, and his second wife had lost his fortune: now there's just enough for him to live on with Basque, his male servant, and a few female ones, all of whom he calls Nicolette, regardless of their real names.

Though Gillenormand's political leanings have been described in a somewhat disapproving manner, and the man seems somewhat ridiculous and absurd, the narrator also suggests that there's room to sympathize with him—he's comical rather than truly despicable.

Chapter 6 Gillenormand takes many liberties, and isn't at all surprised when a servant-maid named Magnon accuses the 84-year-old of having fathered her child. He takes on the child, referring to several famous figures who had children at very advanced ages. But when the woman sends him another boy the next year, he sends them back along with a monthly maintenance. Gillenormand often gives alms, and is kind and charitable. He had a daughter by his first wife and another by his second. This second daughter had married a soldier who had made colonel at Waterloo, before she died around the age of 30 (Gillenormand calls him the disgrace of his family).

The narrator has previously suggested that men should bear much of the blame and the burden for getting women pregnant out of wedlock and so causing them misery, but here the narrator seems to portray Magnon as the one taking advantage of Gillenormand's bumbling, forgetful joviality. Again the narrator stresses internal contradiction within characters: Gillenormand is both charitable towards the poor and harsh towards his own family.

Chapter 7 The narrator notes that Gillenormand is both frivolous and great, in the style of the 18th century. On abandoning society as a retired man, he eats at 5:00 each evening and only receives people afterwards, calling daytime "vulgar."

The narrator classifies Gillenormand as a historical type, associating a certain attitude, politics, and lifestyle with an entire century, one to be distinguished from the present.

Chapter 8 As young women, Gillenormand's daughters had been quite different: one charming, musical, and artistic, the other shrewd and hoping to catch a wealthy husband. The younger married the man she loved, but then died; the older never married. Now the latter, Mademoiselle Gillenormand is overly demure, not exposing any parts of her body whatsoever. She had never been malicious, and is now vaguely melancholy at her life that never really started. She lives with her father and with his grandson, a little boy whom Gillenormand idolizes, though he usually addresses him in a severe shout.

Gillenormand's daughters conform to two distinct types, which are nevertheless different from the physiognomic description of their father. The narrator suggests that it is the lack of love that has prevented Mademoiselle Gillenormand's life from ever really starting. Her sister's life, on the other hand, is for the narrator redeemed by the fact that she married the person she loved—even though she died early.

VOLUME 3, BOOK 3: THE GRANDFATHER AND THE GRANDSON

Chapter 1 Gillenormand had always been well-received in society because of his wit. Around 1817, he had often gone to see Madame la Baronne de T., whose late husband had been an ambassador under Louis XVI, at her salon or intellectual gathering. The group would gather to complain about the new century's horrors and would parody the Revolution.

Six years before the events that the narrator is relating in Paris, it's still the Restoration, and Gillenormand is associated with a group that is nostalgic for pre-Revolutionary days, when the monarchy was not yet challenged.


Chapter 2 At Vernon around that time could be seen a 50-year-old man, Georges Pontmercy, living alone and working often in his garden. He was timid and shy. As a young man, he had fought in the Revolution for Napoleon and against the English in 1805, and then at Austerlitz and Waterloo, among other battles. After Waterloo, where he'd been pulled out of the hollow ravine, he'd been sent to Vernon, on half-pay, as Louis XVIII didn't recognize the grades or awards he'd received under Napoleon. During the Empire, he'd married the younger Mademoiselle Gillenormand, who had died after giving birth.

Readers might recognize the name of Georges Pontmercy from the end of the section on the battle of Waterloo— Pontmercy had been wounded and Thenardier had attempted to rob him, though Pontmercy believed the man had saved him. The narrator suggests that we feel pity and sympathy for Pontmercy, whose participation in these battles seems to count for nothing because of the change of regime.

Though Pontmercy adores his son Marius, the boy's grandfather, Gillenormand, had threatened to disinherit him if Pontmercy did not allow Marius to live with his grandfather. Gillenormand never allows the colonel to visit Marius. The boy is the heir of Gillenormand's sister, who had quite a large fortune. Twice a year, Marius writes letters to his father, but his grandfather hides the return letters.

Gillenormand may be comical and ridiculous, but here the narrator exposes the small, selfish, and even cruel aspect of his character, as he refuses to allow Marius to have a relationship with his father because Pontmercy's political views differ from Gillenormand's.

Chapter 3 Marius knows nothing of the world but Madame la Baronne de T.'s salon, making him a grave, melancholy child, his mind filled with stories against Napoleon's Empire and against revolution. The narrator lists dozens of names, all of whom constitute Parisian high royalist society. Old manners reign there, and men and actions are judged harshly in the salon. The guests are "ultra," meaning they "go beyond"—they attack everything for not being sufficiently correct, the king for not being royal enough, the night for being too lit up, etc.

By cataloguing the attendees of Madame la Baronne de T.'s salon, the narrator constructs a typology of the different inhabitants of Paris during the first half of the 19th century, along with their complex political affiliations. At the time one had to decide where one stood regarding royalism and the monarchy, Napoleon's empire, and the French Revolution with its continued revolutionary attitudes.

From 1814 to 1820, this kind of thought is typical of the Restoration. The salon has its own literature, politics, and history, though towards 1820 it begins to disintegrate into absolutism and thus, paradoxically, confused ideals. Marius attends college and law school as a fanatical Royalist, and emerges as a cold but noble, generous, and proud young man.

The narrator suggests that the Restoration milieu is worthy of examination and consideration, but he also looks disapprovingly on royalist attitudes among the young by describing Marius as cold and proud.

Chapter 4 In 1827, Marius has just turned 17, and he returns home one evening to hear Gillenormand order him to set off to Vernon tomorrow to see his father, who is ill and demands his presence. Marius arrives the next evening. A woman answers the door, weeping, and points him towards a ground-floor room. Pontmercy had been attacked by brain fever three days previously, and he has just died; his son has arrived too late. Marius gazes upon his father's face and a chill runs through him, though his sorrow is that of a man's death, not his father's, whom he does not know well enough to love.

Because of the actions of Gillenormand, Marius has never spent time with his father or received his father's letters, and therefore never really learned to love him. The narrator contrasts the somber gravity of Pontmercy's death with Marius's cold, detached response, a juxtaposition that is meant to make the reader reflect on the tragedy of not being able to love another human being, especially a close family member.

The servant gives Marius a note from his father, who writes that he wishes to give Marius the title of Baron that he himself received at Waterloo. He also writes that a sergeant saved his life at Waterloo—Thenardier—and asks Marius to do any good he can to the man should he ever meet him. Marius remains two days in Vernon, and returns to Paris without thinking much more of his father.

The note given to Marius by his father's servant contains more interesting information for the reader than for Marius, and suggests that several strands of the novel, from the Thenardiers in Montfermeil to Marius and his grandfather in Paris, might find ways of intermingling.

Chapter 5 Marius goes to Mass the Sunday after his father's death, and as he sits down, an old man tells Marius that he's taken his place. After Mass, the old man explains that he enjoys sitting in that spot because for the last ten years, he's seen a father come regularly to catch a glimpse of his child, hiding behind a pillar. The old man, Mabeuf, was moved by this love and this spot has become holy for him. The man, he says, had a father-in-law who threatened to disinherit the child if his father saw him, and he sacrificed himself so that his son could one day be rich. He lived at Vernon and was called something like Pontmarie or Montpercy. "Pontmercy," Marius suggests, and reveals to the old man that he is the son.

This is another striking coincidence, like others in the novel through which characters learn more about their own pasts and are motivated to change something about their actions or morals. In this scene it is only slowly that Marius comes to recognize that M. Mabeuf is speaking about his own father. While Marius was incapable of feeling true love for his father when he saw him at his deathbed, he now learns the extent to which his father loved him.

Marius accompanies the man home, and the next day he asks Gillenormand for permission to leave for three days for a hunting-party with friends.

Apparently, his realization has prompted Marius to act in some way, though we don't yet know how.

Chapter 6 After three days (which the narrator will tell of later on) Marius returns to Paris and asks for the law school library's files of the Moniteur newspapers. He reads all the history books he can find, and feverishly searches for his father's name among the army bulletins. He goes to see the generals under whom his father had served, and comes to know his father better in that way. He's so preoccupied that Gillenormand assumes a love affair is the cause.

Just as the narrator has stressed the interpenetration of history and individual lives throughout the novel, Marius now finds that "history," which he had formerly considered detachedly in salon conversation, is in fact directly relevant to his own past and his relationship to his father.

Slowly, Marius's opinions and ideas begin to shift radically. Initially astonished by his reading about the Republic and Empire, he stops considering their major characters with terror and scorn but rather considers them heroic and good. He considers the Republic as a moment of mass sovereignty and civil rights, and the Empire as the sovereignty of the French idea in Europe. He realizes how little he had understood his country and his father, and is filled with regret at not having known either.

Having grown up around royalist beliefs, Marius had never thought to question his political views. Not only are his ideas now challenged, but they come to seem highly important, even urgent, to his own character. For Marius, learning about France and French history now becomes tantamount to learning about his own past as well.


From his childhood, Marius had been taught to despise Napoleon as a monster. Only slowly, by reading carefully, does he begin to rehabilitate the man in his mind. As he pores over volumes of army battles, he feels closer to his father and can almost picture the battles in his mind's eye. He is intoxicated by this conversion and, the narrator notes, embraces a good deal of error while on his way to the truth. Finally, though, he becomes a true democratic revolutionist. Slowly he withdraws from Gillenormand, feeling greater aversion for the man who cut him off from his father. He spends less and less time at home, once attempting to see Thenardier in Montfermeil, though the inn is closed.

Again history becomes personally relevant for Marius, as he begins to imagine his father not as a dead stranger but as a real human being, one who fought, loved, and died in the shadow of some of the most important events of French history. Crucially, it is this personal identification that prompts Marius to transform his political views—a change that the narrator has suggested elsewhere is necessary for people to understand and change their attitudes towards the poor, as well.

Chapter 7 One morning, Marius again asks his grandfather's permission to take a trip. Gillenormand still thinks it's for a love affair, but Mademoiselle Gillenormand is starting to be suspicious. Later that day, Marius's distant cousin Theodule, a lieutenant, whom Marius has never met, arrives unannounced to say hello to his aunt. Mademoiselle Gillenormand asks him if he would follow Marius a little that evening to see what he was up to. That evening, Marius sets off for Vernon in a diligence (stage coach), which Theodule enters as well. He watches Marius buy flowers from a peasant girl and follows him around the corner, where he sees Marius strewing his bouquet across a grave and sobbing before it. The stone is engraved with "Colonel Baron Pontmercy."

Through the medium of Theodule (and with the prompting of Mademoiselle Gillenormand) we learn how exactly Marius has been spending his time away from home, and just how loyal he has grown to his late father. Marius is now attempting to show love for him in a way he never did while his father was alive. Les Misérables *is full of characters who try to conceal some of their actions or their pasts, but this attempted concealment never seems to work, as other characters are just as adept at ferreting out these secrets.*

Chapter 8 Marius has come here every time he's been "sleeping out." Theodule slips away and decides not to write to his aunt at all. Marius returns on the third day, and quickly leaves his room to take a bath. Gillenormand mounts the stairs to greet Marius. In the empty room, he sees a great coat, with a black ribbon strung to a medallion portrait case, on the bed: he seizes them and goes back downstairs. He and his daughter open the case and read the note from the colonel giving his son the title of Baron. They are stunned. In the pocket of the great coat are dozens of cards printed with "Le Baron Marius Pontmercy."

Initially, it appears as though Theodule (who has no reason to understand the connection between Marius and a certain Colonel Pontmercy) will keep Marius's secret to himself. What stuns Gillenormand more than Marius's concealment of where he's been going is his sudden shift in loyalties. Taking on the title of "Baron," which was given to him by his father, suggests that Marius's political and social worldview has been entirely transformed.

For an hour, the two sit in silence. Then Marius comes downstairs, and sees his grandfather holding one of his cards. Gillenormand asks what the meaning of this is, and Marius, with downcast eyes, says that his father was a hero who served the Republic and France and who loved his son. Gillenormand turns purple and curses at Marius, calling all those men assassins and thieves, traitors who fled the true king. Now Marius grows enraged, but is torn between his father and grandfather. After several moments, however, he cries "Down with the Bourbons and with Louis XVIII!" Gillenormand turns white, and after pacing the room, says quietly that he and a baron like his grandson cannot continue to live under the same roof. He orders Marius to leave.

The climax of tension between Marius and his grandfather takes the form not of a personal battle of wills, but as a duel between conflicting political affiliations and viewpoints. For both Gillenormand and (now) Marius, these political views necessarily shape and define a person's character, and serve as an insoluble link between the arc of history and the smaller arc of a human life. Neither of them are yet ready to forgive the other for refusing to adhere to one or another of these worldviews.

The next day, Gillenormand tells his daughter to send Marius money every six months, but to never mention his name. Marius, meanwhile, has only 30 francs in his pocket. He heads towards the Latin Quarter without knowing what he'll do.

It seems that the break between Gillenormand and Marius is definitive. The decision to send Marius money somewhat cushions their separation, though it doesn't mean Gillenormand forgives Marius.


VOLUME 3, BOOK 4: THE FRIENDS OF THE ABC

Chapter 1 Around this time, a revolutionary air begins to arise in Paris, as various currents of thought intersect. Several organizations begin to spring up among the youths, one of which is called the Friends of the ABC, or "Abaissé," meaning "debased" or "people." It's a small secret society that meets at the little Café Musain near the Pantheon. Most members are students from the southern provinces. One, Enjolras, is from a wealthy family. He's handsome and passionate about liberty and the Republic. Combeferre is less lofty but more flexible and gentler towards his fellow man. He is clever and intellectual, fascinated by educational questions, and inclined to let progress take its course. Prouvaire is a romantic, Feuilly a self-educated workingman, Bahorel capricious and somewhat lazy. Courfeyrac seems much like Tholomyes, witty and jovial, but has a much deeper center. Bossuet, also known as Laigle de Meaux, is smart but very unlucky, though with a good humor. These men differ greatly; they're united only by the religion of Progress. Only Grantaire is a skeptic, smiling at the talk of revolution and progress. He adores Enjolras, though the latter disdains him.

This time, it's the deeply personal battle between Gillenormand and Marius that allows the narrator to transition into a broader political conversation. Their argument then comes to stand for general political changes taking place in Paris around this time. The Latin Quarter, where Marius is now heading, has long been known both as a student neighborhood and as a center for leftist political activity. The narrator then reveals the diversity of characters within this radical milieu, from the romantic Prouvaire to the practical, working-class Feuilly. Rather than describing these characters as affiliated to a political party, the narrator suggests that they have found a common cause in a certain value—one of progress—which is linked to general democracy far more than to one politician or the other.


Chapter 2 One day Bossuet is leaning against the door of the Café Musain when he sees a young man in a cabriolet with a tag on his luggage that says "Marius Pontmercy." Bossuet calls out to him and says he was looking for him. He hadn't been in class yesterday, Bossuet says. The professor had called out Marius's name, and Bossuet had answered "present" to prevent Marius from being stricken off the list and forced to pay a fine. Then the professor heard Bossuet answer to "Laigle" as well, so he crossed out that name—Bossuet's real name. Marius asks his pardon, but then Bossuet bursts out laughing, saying he never wanted to be a lawyer anyway. Courfeyrac, emerging from the café, invites Marius to stay in his room, and by that evening he's installed there.

We've been introduced to Bossuet as the member of the student gang who has the worst luck, and here his attitude is playful rather than accusatory, reflecting the general tone of the group, which seems to fail to take anything too seriously. The narrator portrays this attitude sympathetically, tying the carefree nature of the "Friends of the ABC" to the kindhearted gesture of Courfeyrac, who invites the newly-arrived Marius to stay in his room.

Chapter 3 In a few days Courfeyrac and Marius are friends, especially once he learns Marius' political opinions. He invites Marius to the Friends of the ABC, where his head spins at the talk of philosophy, art, history, and religion. Marius had thought his ideas were fixed; now he is thrown into tumult again.

A crucial part of the personal friendship between Courfeyrac and Marius is their political leanings. Indeed, among the Friends of the ABC, politics and friendship are entirely intertwined.

Chapter 4 One conversation is a particular shock to Marius. Grantaire, who has gotten drunk, is shouting that life is a hideous invention and there is no difference between vice and virtue. There is no reason to admire one country over the other: war corrupts them all. Bossuet tries to silence Grantaire, but he continues to spew complaints on man's cruelty and failure. Meanwhile, one corner is discussing mythology, another the politics of the Touquet Charter. Courfeyrac has seized a copy and is waving it around, dismissing it as a way for the king to pacify the people rather than allowing full democracy.

The narrator relates how the Friends of the ABC embrace political discussion, but the general thrust of the group is against a kind of nihilism like Grantaire's, even if the others allow Grantaire a forum for his views. The reader is given a vivid glimpse into the political café lifestyle, where the theatrical speeches of people like Courfeyrac mesh with real political questions, and history itself seems to be at stake.

Chapter 5 In the middle of the conversation, Bossuet suddenly refers to a certain date: June 18th, 1815—Waterloo. At that name Marius pays greater attention. Courfeyrac exclaims at this mention of Bonaparte's fatal number, while Enjolras says it reflects both Napoleon's crime and proper comeuppance. Agitated, Marius points to Corsica (Napoleon's birthplace) on a map of France and says this little island has made France great. All grow silent; Marius says that it does not diminish France to join Napoleon to her. He asks what the men admire if not the Emperor, who was as complete a leader as possible, brave and powerful in battle. After an eloquent speech about Napoleon, Marius asks what could be greater than to embrace France as a great nation with armies conquering the earth. Combeferre answers, "To be free."

Whereas Marius has been in agreement with Courfeyrac and the other Friends of the ABC on the need to do away with royalism and the monarchy, he also retains a deeply-held belief in the greatness of Napoleon. This is due, of course, to his father's participation in the Napoleonic wars. At this point, the irreverence of the group bothers rather than attracts Marius, who feels the need to pledge allegiance to one leader in particular. Combeferre's response to Marius's rhetorical question suggests another way of thinking about political loyalties—adhering to values rather than to a person.

Marius lowers his eyes; when he raises them everyone but Enjolras has left the room. On the stairs, Combeferre is singing a song about preferring the love of one's mother to the glory of Caesar. Enjolras tells Marius that his mother is the Republic.

The Friends of the ABC suggest to Marius that he shouldn't adhere to glory in the form of Napoleon, but rather to values such as the love of freedom.

Chapter 6 Marius feels gloomy and wonders if he must reject his new faith. He's now no longer in agreement with either his grandfather or his friends. He is both progressive and reactionary, and feels doubly isolated, so he stops going to the Café Musain. One day, Courfeyrac comes to his room and asks Marius what he plans to do, since he has no money and has ceased to go to class. Marius says he has a gold watch and coat that he can sell, and he'll do anything after that, perhaps learn German and translate English and German articles. In the meantime, his aunt has discovered where he lives, and sends him 600 francs in a box. Marius sends them back with a respectful letter saying he doesn't need them (though he has only 3 francs left). His aunt, who knows her father had said he never wanted to hear the boy's name again, doesn't tell Gillenormand.

The narrator has already attempted to show the interlocking relations among different political allegiances, from royalism and Bonapartism to democratic viewpoints. There is some common ground among these, which has allowed Marius to fit in easily with the Friends of the ABC, but now he finds himself once again having to choose between both personal and political allegiances. Even while doing so, Marius remains stubbornly against reconciliation with his grandfather, which for him would mean reconciliation to a now totally alien political worldview.

VOLUME 3, BOOK 5: THE EXCELLENCE OF MISFORTUNE

Chapter 1 Marius is forced to leave the hotel so as not to go into debt, and he begins to go hungry. He learns to endure the locked door at night when the rent is not paid, the laughter of young girls, and the sneers of neighbors. Misery, notes the narrator, can sometimes strengthen the soul, creating obscure heroes, but heroes who still hold their own greatness.

Stubborn in his belief in the personal significance of political values, Marius is willing to go so far as to starve just to refuse his grandfather's money. Here the narrator again contrasts voluntarily chosen misery with misery thrust upon people.

Marius is finally admitted to practice as a lawyer, and he tells his grandfather in a cold but respectful letter. Gillenormand trembles as he reads it and then throws it into the trash. But he later mumbles to himself that one cannot be both a baron and a lawyer.

The narrator makes it clear to the reader that Gillenormand has not lost his love for Marius, even if he too is too stubborn to reconcile himself with his grandson.

Chapter 2 Finally Marius's misery ends up becoming bearable. He learns German and English; he translates articles and does other small tasks for about 700 francs a year. He moves into the Gorbeau hovel, where he eats meagerly but sometimes splurges on a dinner at the Restaurant Rousseau. With all his expenses, he usually has fifty francs a year left over. It has taken several years of hard labor and destitution, but he's never been in debt, which he considers the first step to slavery.

Marius's lifestyle immediately brings to mind the contrasting values and lifestyle of the Thenardiers, who think nothing of going into debt, spend extravagantly, and would rather do anything other than make an honest living for themselves. However, the narrator also suggests that Marius may be somewhat immature in his insistence on clinging to his own freedom.

Marius never forgets two names: that of his father, and that of Thenardier. He had been distressed at hearing of the man's ruin at Montfermeil, and has never been able to find him since, though he's traveled through the whole country, and he vows to continue to look. He dreams of finding Thenardier and bringing him out of misery.

This passage is a textbook case of dramatic irony: Marius holds one view of Thenardier, which the narrator and the readers know to be utterly mistaken, but which continues to serve as a trigger for Marius's actions as he searches for Thenardier.

Chapter 3 Three years after he left, Marius still imagines that Gillenormand had never loved him, although his grandfather had adored him despite his severity. Gillenormand secretly had hoped his grandson would return. When Guillenormand asks himself if he'd act the same all over again, his pride answers yes, but his age and sadness answer no. He misses Marius and thinks of him constantly. His daughter, meanwhile, thinks of Marius less and less. At the same time Marius thinks of Gillenormand without bitterness, and is happy to have suffered for his father's sake. He feels that he has become a man: misery has been good for him. He perhaps has spent too much time in meditation, not understanding that contemplation can become another form of idleness.

Here the narrator notes explicitly just how much Gillenormand has sacrificed for his pride and for his political opinions—opinions which, if he is honest with himself, count for less than the love of his grandson. The narrator contrasts this viewpoint with Marius's perspective—in his youth he is less needy for the love of others. The narrator is sympathetic towards Marius, but again suggests that his monastic, pure lifestyle might be blinding him to other ways of doing good.

One publisher offers to take Marius into his house, lodge him, give him work, and pay 1500 francs, but that would mean giving up his liberty and his dignity, so he refuses. He remains friends with Courfeyrac, though he no longer frequents the Friends of the ABC. His one other friend is the old man named M. Mabeuf, the warden at church who had been responsible for reintroducing Marius to his father.

Once again the narrator portrays Marius as admirable, but ultimately somewhat immature in his stubborn insistence on living as a free man. In doing so, he's able to remain loyal to his own values, but he also is prevented from establishing truly close relationships with others.


Chapter 4 Mabeuf understands little of how he himself impacted Marius's political opinions, and he prefers to think less about politics than about plants and books. He has never loved any woman as much as a tulip bulb. He once told someone that he has forgotten whether or not he was ever married. Mabeuf lives alone with an old housekeeper, a spinster. Marius enjoys spending time with Mabeuf when he's tired of reading about wars and military glory.

With Mabeuf, the narrator introduces us to yet another of the unique and often eccentric figures that populate Hugo's Paris. In this case, Mabeuf is not meant to represent a notch on the continuum between good and evil or condemnation and redemption, but rather is an odd, harmless character whom the narrator portrays fondly.

In 1830, Mabeuf's brother dies, and a notary's mistake results in him receiving no inheritance. The July Revolution brings a publishing crisis, and the first books to cease to sell are the ones about flowers. Mabeuf is forced to leave his house, sell some of his prints, and move into a tiny thatched cottage near the Salpetriere. But Mabeuf remains calm and serene.

By depicting Mabeuf as an eccentric and absentminded but well-intentioned old man, the narrator makes us sympathize with him in his bad luck. This is another reminder that a downward spiral towards misery can have little to do with one's own actions or merit.

Chapter 5 When he's not seeing Mabeuf or Courfeyrac, Marius takes pleasure in his long walks on the boulevards, the Champs-de-Mars, or in the Luxembourg Gardens. Sometimes he goes to visit his father's old generals or comrades, though he only attends their parties on days when it's freezing cold, since he can't afford a carriage and doesn't want to arrive with dirty boots (from the unfrozen ground).

Marius is slowly establishing a routine and a lifestyle for himself away from his grandfather, who's been replaced not only by Marius's radical political friends but also by friends of his father, men whom Gillenormand would consider the ultimate political enemies.

Even with the Revolution of 1830, Marius's opinions stay the same, though he thinks of human affairs as largely small and petty. Still, he has pure ideas and aspirations for the future, and the narrator notes that a man's real character is to be found in his aspirations. Towards the middle of 1831, the old porter tells Marius that his neighbors, the Jondrettes, are being turned out since they have not paid their rent of 20 francs. Marius has thirty francs saved up in a drawer, and gives 25 to the porter, telling her to give it to them without telling them that it was him.

The Revolution of 1830 ultimately only resulted in a change of dynasty. For Marius, not only is such change not enough, but earthly politics itself is not as important as the valiant heroism and other idealistic values that Marius has embraced. The narrator seems to suggest the inadequacy of this point of view, even if Marius does show signs of generosity in the "real" world.

Chapter 6 Theodule's regiment arrives in Paris for garrison duty, and Mademoiselle Gillenormand decides to plot to have Theodule take Marius's place as the heir. She tells her father that Theodule is coming, but he cares little. Instead he grows enraged by what he's reading about, a students' conflict with the Minister of War. The schools of law and medicine plan to "deliberate" on the War Minister's actions at the Place du Pantheon that day. He angrily imagines Marius there with them. At that moment, Theodule arrives, and Gillenormand begins a monologue about the absurdity of the radical young students, and how idiotic Marius was to leave and become a republican.

While Mademoiselle Gillenormand's plan seems ideally positioned to take advantage of Gillenormand's anger about Marius's political leanings, Gillenormand himself is so obsessed with his grandson's potential activities that he has little time to think about anything else. Gillenormand's obsessive behavior reminds us that he still harbors profound love and affection for Marius, even if he can't bring himself to ask him for forgiveness.

Political disagreements are now devolving into chaos and disorder, Gillenormand says, growing more and more dramatic. At each pronouncement, Theodule says that his uncle is right, nods his head, or remarks at his eloquence. Finally, Gillenormand pauses, looks Theodule in the eye, and says he is a fool.

Theodule is portrayed as a dutiful, somewhat boring character, whose careful deference seems calculating and doesn't fool Gillenormand. Theodule can't understand Gillenormand's eccentric way of showing his love for Marius.

VOLUME 3, BOOK 6: THE CONJUNCTION OF TWO STARS

Chapter 1 At this time, Marius has become a handsome man with thick black hair, a calm, sincere air, and reserved but polished manners. When he had been in his deepest misery, he had believed young girls would turn and look at him to make fun of him, when in fact they admired him. The only women he doesn't flee from is the old bearded woman who sweeps his room, and a young girl whom he often sees with an older man during his walks in the Luxembourg. The man seems sad, serious, and about 60, while the girl is a thin, homely, and awkward child of about 13. The girl is often chattering happily, while the old man looks at her fondly. Marius enjoys watching this couple, calling the daughter Mademoiselle Lanoire ("the girl in black") and the father Monsieur Leblanc ("the man in white").

As Marius had found a way to survive without the wealth of his grandfather, and even without sacrificing any of his principles, his growing emotional depth and maturity become (as is so often the case in Hugo) reflected by a greater physical beauty as well. We're once again introduced to Valjean as if he was a stranger. Through this mechanism the narrator allows Valjean to more fully take on a variety of personae, and it emphasizes just how successful (even if not entirely so) he is at beginning anew and concealing much of his past.

Chapter 2 For around six months Marius doesn't find the time to go to the Luxembourg, and when he finally returns to the area it's a calm summer morning and he's in a wonderful mood. He again catches sight of the same man, though now he seems to be with a different girl: she's tall and beautiful, with thick brown hair and white cheeks. As Marius approaches them, he realizes that the little girl has become this beautiful young woman. She is now dressed elegantly but simply. As he passes by, she raises her eyes and looks at him indifferently, while Marius, after the initial shock, begins to think of something else.

Just as Marius underwent a transformation from sullen, cold political reactionary to handsome, thriving political radical, so too is the "young girl," whom we know to be Cosette, transformed within the boundaries of a single season. Still, this is not yet a case of love at first sight—Marius registers the girl's beauty as if noting an objective fact, and then moves on to other thoughts, suggesting that he's not yet ready for love.

Chapter 3 One day, as Marius is walking near the bench where the father and daughter habitually sit, the girl raises her eyes to him, and their glances meet. Suddenly, everything has changed: it is the first glance of an innocent girl that, even as she is unaware, prefigures a future maturity. That evening, Marius thinks for the first time that he's been stupid to go for his usual walks in his everyday, threadbare clothes.

Significantly, it is a meeting of the eyes—as cliché would have it, windows into the soul—that unlocks Marius's heretofore indifferent heart and begins to provoke in him a greater interest and care not only for his own appearance, but for this mysterious young woman's character.

Chapter 4 The next day, Marius sets off in his good clothes to the Luxembourg. On the way he encounters Courfeyrac, but pretends not to see him—Courfeyrac tells his friends that Marius looks quite silly. Marius turns slowly towards his usual alley and sees the couple, a kind of whistling in his ears. Before he reaches the bench, he retreats, then approaches from the opposite side. As he reaches the bench, his heart beats wildly. He imagines she's watching him, and stumbles. That evening, he forgets to eat dinner, and only goes to bed after he carefully cleans his coat.

Marius's behavior is almost a caricature of the young man in love for the first time, a position Courfeyrac takes advantage of in shaking his head at Marius. Still, this is one of the first times that we see Marius's interest directed towards a living, breathing human being, not just towards his deeply held ideals or to the memory of his late father. The narrator suggests that Marius might appear ridiculous, but this is a healthy shift for him.

Chapter 5 For the next fortnight, Marius goes to the Luxembourg every day in his new coat, always glancing at the girl from his bench down the lane.

While Marius has been transformed, the girl herself is entirely unaware.

Chapter 6 One day at the Luxembourg, Marius sits with an open book on his lap and gives a start, seeing that the couple is approaching him. As the girl passes, she glances at him sweetly. Marius feels dazzled and overwhelmed. He jumps up after they pass and paces the park, before racing off to meet Courfeyrac and go to the theater. All that night and the next morning Courfeyrac notices how feverish Marius seems. He's fallen in love as a result of the girl's glance.

Again it is the gaze or glance of the young woman that really provokes Marius's enchantment. This suggests that it's not only Cosette's beauty, but also the possibility of true communication and understanding that he intuits, even if only foggily, as the source of his falling in love with her.

Chapter 7 Marius's isolation and independence, as well as his religious devotion to his father, have not prepared him for this passion. He continues to go to the park, and the old man, "M. Leblanc," starts to notice: he moves places, or sometimes comes without the girl and sees that Marius doesn't stay. Marius doesn't notice that he's made a mistake in this.

Again the narrator stresses how Marius's one form of devotion has not counted as a living experience of love, meaning that he's not prepared either to be in love himself, or to take a step towards the object of his affections without alienating her father.

One day Marius finds on the pair's bench a simple handkerchief marked with the letters U.F., and he kisses and caresses it, believing her name must be "Ursule." He doesn't know it belongs to the old man.

The narrator takes advantage of Marius's besotted state to gently poke fun at him and his reverential attitude to any possible possession of the girl.

Chapter 8 One day a gust of wind sweeps into the alley and the girl lifts her dress, exposing her leg. Marius is furious and jealous: he wants to preserve the girl's total purity. He gazes at her severely and she looks back surprised: it's their "first quarrel." He finally forgives her; his passion only increases.

The relationship between Marius and the girl does seem to be developing, though with the unique kinds of communication and misunderstandings only possible in an unspoken set-up.

Chapter 9 No longer satisfied just to know (he thinks) the girl's name, Marius follows them home one day to the Rue de l'Ouest, a modest house, and asks the porter which floor the gentleman lives on. The porter says the man is a gentleman of property who does much charity though he's not himself rich.

Though Marius is unaware of "Leblanc's" true identity, we readers are familiar with Valjean's generosity and its juxtaposition with his modest demeanor—and how word of this spreads in whatever environment he finds himself.

For the next few days, father and daughter don't come to the Luxembourg, so at night Marius hides and watches the third-floor window of their home. On the third night, the shades are drawn and the floor is dark. The porter says the man has moved away, and he doesn't know where.

Marius has had only a tenuous connection to the father and daughter, and doesn't know their names or address. If they cease going to the Luxembourg, it appears that their path is wiped clean.

VOLUME 3, BOOK 7: PATRON MINETTE

Chapter 1 The narrator notes that all human societies have a "third lower floor," a theatrical phrase that means certain minerals under the "ground" of civilization—a religious, economic, or revolutionary mine that can eventually break into the light. The future emerges from these excavations, which hold all the past's great thinkers. Below these mines and galleries is the grave of shadows, a cellar of the blind.

Through this theatrical metaphor, the narrator emphasizes how "darkness" collects and is deposited "underground," because topographically it is located "beneath" light. This suggests that light and darkness do not exist in entirely different planes, but that one can break into the other.

Chapter 2 There, closest to hell, roam specters and phantoms whose life is ignorance and misery. In the upper mines are revolutionary and political excavations, all purity, honesty, and progress, but this cavern of evil must also be understood, as it seeks to destroy all others, undermining civilization, human thought, revolution, and progress. A lower layer is theft, prostitution, and murder. The only true social peril is darkness, further blackened by ignorance.

The narrator's conception of the lower "floors" of civilization recalls Dante's Inferno, in which various categories of evil are placed in a hierarchy, some considered better or worse than others. The narrator is eager to stress how some evil can bear a relation to good, whereas other aspects cannot.

Chapter 3 The leaders of Paris's lower floor at this time are ruffians called Claquesous, Gueulemer, Babet, and Montparnasse. Gueulemer is massive and idle; Babet thin, chatty, and thoughtless; Claquesous only emerges at night; and Montparnasse is a child, sluggish and effeminate, embracing robbery and murder: a "dandy of the sepulcher."

The narrator positions these men firmly below political revolutionaries (who may nevertheless also be violent) in his hierarchy of good and evil. That these figures are men of the night only emphasizes the link between darkness and evil.

Chapter 4 These ruffians are described as a robber with four heads operating throughout Paris, assembling at nightfall in their group, "Patron-Minette," which in the slang of the time means "morning," the time when their activities end. Others have joined the group, all with various nicknames. These kinds of men have always existed: they seem less men than beasts, only destructible through light.

Individually, each of these characters clings to the darkness, but through the metaphor of the robber with four heads, the narrator suggests that it is by joining together that they truly locate themselves in the darkness and forbid any light from entering their activities.


VOLUME 3, BOOK 8: THE WICKED POOR MAN

Chapter 1 Winter arrives and Marius has still failed to find the girl, who has ceased to come to the Luxembourg. He is melancholy and despairing, berating himself for following her and thus being suspected by the father. One night he joins his friends at a ball, desperately hoping he might see her there, but he returns dejected and fatigued. Another day he catches sight of a man dressed like a workingman in the Boulevard des Invalides, whose white hair reminds him of M. Leblanc. But Marius cannot get a better look, and finally decides he was seeing things.

Marius has realized that he bears much of the blame for having lost track of the young woman, since he wasn't careful enough and probably caused her father's suspicion. Knowing Valjean as we do, we are less surprised than Marius at Valjean's eagerness to change disguises and attempt to conceal his past once more. It's quite likely that he is in fact the workingman Marius spotted.

Chapter 2 The only remaining residents of the Gorbeau house are Marius and the Jondrettes, whose rent he'd once paid. One night Marius is walking along when two wild-looking young girls in rags jostle past him and whisper that the "bobbies" have come: they have to run away. Then he sees they've dropped a package, but he cannot find the girls again. Marius thinks gloomily about how young girls used to appear to him as angels, but now only as ghouls.

His act of paying the Jondrettes' rent had been the first intimation that Marius, though self-absorbed, was ultimately charitable and generous at heart. Still, Marius's somewhat self-absorbed reaction in the face of the girls' desperation suggests that he hasn't entirely matured.

Chapter 3 That evening, he finds the package in his pocket and decides to open it in case he sees the address. In it are four letters, addressed to various wealthy philanthropists in Paris and signed by four different names. They all ask for money and describe number of wretched circumstances. All are written by the same hand, and none includes an address. Marius is too melancholy to try to solve this mystery, and he flings the papers away. The next morning, there is a knock at his door, and he hears the broken, hoarse voice of an old man: he opens and sees a young girl.

Once again, Marius's obsession with finding the young girl and continuing the happy summer of his love prevents him from clearly understanding the situation around him. In this case, it's obvious that there is something to be suspected in the undifferentiated appeals to multiple philanthropists—appeals apparently delivered by the two young girls in rags he'd seen on the street.

Chapter 4 The girl is skinny and frail, pale with missing teeth, though with the remains of beauty now dying away. The girl addresses Marius by name, though he doesn't know her, and gives him a letter in which Jondrette thanks him, as he's just found out that it was Marius who paid his rent six months ago. Jondrette says they haven't had bread for four days and asks for a slight favor.

Once again, ugliness and misery are linked in the novel, as it is suggested that misery has done its best to wipe away any last remnant of beauty. Though Marius had been too wrapped up in his own love to piece together the mystery, the mystery has now come to him through this girl.

Marius suddenly understands the letters from the night before: this one is in the same hand. Jondrette evidently takes advantage of the charity of benevolent people and sends his daughters off to collect alms. His game has made the girls into a kind of impure but innocent under-species. Marius watches the girl wander around the room and feels pity for what she could have been. She cries out that he has books, and swears that she knows how to read. She and her sister were not always as they are now, she says.

The narrator clearly places the blame for the exploitation of wealthy philanthropists entirely on the shoulders of the Jondrette father. His two daughters are considered to be only more victims of his manipulation. This characterization underlines the general theme in Les Misérables *of the particular misery of women, who are often taken advantage of and have few protections in place in society.*

Marius tells the girl that he has a package that belongs to her. She's delighted, saying that she's been looking for it everywhere: now perhaps she'll get breakfast today. Marius searches his pockets and finally finds five francs, which with 15 sous is all he now owns: he gives 5 francs to the girl, and, delighted, she departs.

Only by inviting the girl directly into his home and interacting with her does Marius finally take pity on her. This direct interaction invites his generosity.

Chapter 5 Marius realizes that he hasn't known true misery. He reproaches himself for the passions and contemplations that have prevented him from seeing the true misery just next door. In fact, if he hadn't been so dreamy he would have realized that he can hear everything from the other side of the wall: there's a hole in the plaster. Now he peeps in to look.

Thanks to the arrival of the young Jondrette girl at his doorstep, Marius now begins to understand the extent of the misery around him, and begins to emerge from the self-absorption that has long characterized his youth.

Chapter 6 Marius's own chamber is shabby, but neat. The hovel he now sees is sordid and dirty, with dark nooks holding insects and who knows what else. Near the table is a small haggard man with a cunning, cruel air, sitting with pen and paper and writing more letters. A large middle-aged woman is crouching near the fireplace, reading a romance, next to her daughter, a puny, ragged 14-year-old.

Like the contrast between physical beauty and ugliness, the contrast between cleanliness and dirt has moral implications in Hugo. He implies a kind of moral darkness in the sordid, grimy hovel where the Jondrettes live.

No trace of work can be seen in the hovel, and the man is grumbling about other wealthy people. The woman comforts him, though she clearly retains only ashes of affection for her husband.

The narrator suggests that laziness on the part of the Jondrettes means that they, rather than others, hold the full blame for their misery.

Chapter 7 Marius is about to duck back down when the door bursts open and the eldest sister walks in to the filthy room. Breathlessly, she announces that the philanthropist from the church of Saint-Jacques is coming in a fiacre (small carriage). She's given him the address. First, the father doesn't believe her, but then his eyes light up and he tells his wife to extinguish the fire. He tells his daughter to pull the straw off the chair: she doesn't understand, so he kicks it through. He tells the smaller girl to break a pane of glass; she strikes it and begins bleeding, and sobbing. The wife chastises him, and the man says this is better—he foresaw that. An icy wind whistles through the room, and the father says they're ready for the philanthropist.

Clearly, Jondrette has employed his two young daughters in his attempts to wring money out of others. This is a shrewdly exploitative move, taking advantage of their youth and pathetic air so that he'll get more out of it. Though Jondrette is apparently looking for the philanthropist's generosity to bring him out of his misery, getting the funds out of him now becomes Jondrette's one obsession, such that he'll make the hovel look even more wretched, with a sobbing young daughter to boot, just to ensure greater generosity.

Chapter 8 After a pause, Jondrette cries that if the philanthropist isn't coming he'll have done all this for nothing. He hates those who make people like them wait, he says—rich men who must have stolen their money. Then a white-haired man and a young girl appear on the threshold. Marius is blown away: it's the young girl whom he hasn't seen for six months.

In a coincidence characteristic of Hugo, several plot strands meet again here, though we've had hints (such as the porter telling Marius of Leblanc's generosity) of this earlier. Jondrette's comment is ironic, given his own cheating and scheming.

Chapter 9 The old man tells Jondrette that he's brought a package with new clothes and blankets. In a low voice, Jondrette asks his daughter which name he'd signed that letter under. When she answers, Jondrette introduces himself as Monsieur Fabantou and makes up a wild tale about his fall into misfortune. He pinches his younger daughter so that she starts sobbing again, and he tells the old man that she cut her hand working for six sous a day at a factory. Jondrette suddenly tells his wife in a low voice to take a good look at the old man, as he continues to complain about all of his woes and his debts of sixty francs for his rent (a lie). M. Leblanc throws five francs on the table, and says he will return that evening at six o'clock with sixty francs. He also leaves behind his coat for the family.

Jondrette has attempted to wring charity out of so many people, under so many different guises, that he's unable to remember which mask he had donned to ask money from this particular philanthropist. Again, Jondrette has an almost theatrical flair in his manipulation of his family for material benefit, intentionally hurting his daughter so that she'll appear even more wretched and miserable, and so inspire more charity. Marius can immediately grasp that Jondrette is lying, since it was Marius himself who paid the rent several months earlier.


Chapter 10 Marius had remained fixated on the young girl for the entire scene. She seemed like a kind of vision in **light**. When she departs, his sole desire is to follow her, but he realizes that M. Leblanc will see him. Still, Marius decides to take the risk and run out the door to follow the couple in the fiacre. He can't afford the carriage, though, as he has only 16 sous with him, and he bitterly watches the fiacre depart. As he returns, he sees from across the street Jondrette speaking with an ominous-looking man, a man of the street: Panchaud, alias Printanier, alias Bigrenaille, a famous rascal who later would become notorious.

Although Marius has slowly developed an interest in the Jondrette family, with its wretched daughters and scheming father, at the sight of the young woman from the Luxembourg he returns to his single-minded obsession on how not to lose her again. Because of this, he's unable to see the full significance of several clues, such as Jondrette's meeting with a criminal, part of the "Patron-Minette" group.

Chapter 11 Marius returns to his room and sees the elder Jondrette girl there. She now seems hateful to him, since he had given her the five francs he could have used for the carriage. He harshly asks what she wants, and she raises her eyes dully to ask why he looks sad. Marius tells her to leave him alone, but she says he was kind this morning, and asks him if she can do anything for him. Marius asks her to find the address of that gentleman and his daughter. Gloomily, she says he must wish to know the beautiful lady, but she will find the address for him.

Ironically, because of Marius's love for the young woman, he feels bitter and bemoans his generosity (another element of love) towards another person. Though Marius is too wrapped up in his own struggles to realize it, the reader quickly understands that the elder Jondrette girl must feel for him something like what he feels for Mademoiselle "Lanoire."


Marius drops into his chair as the girl leaves, but suddenly he hears Jondrette's voice exclaim that he is sure he recognizes the man. Perhaps Jondrette is speaking of M. Leblanc, Marius thinks, and he springs back up to the peep-hole.

Once again, Marius's interest in the Jondrette intrigue stems almost uniquely from his feelings for the girl, and the hope that he'll find out more about this personal mystery.

Chapter 12 The woman turns to Jondrette and asks if he's sure. He says he is—the man hasn't grown old. Jondrette tells his daughters to be off, but to return at five o'clock, as he'll need them then. The young lady, Jondrette says to his wife—it is "she." Rage, hate, and surprise mingle in the wife's face, and she exclaims at the unfairness of this girl's fine clothes when contrasted to her own daughter's misery. She'd like to kick in the beggar brat's stomach, she cries.

For Marius, this scene is largely inexplicable. He cannot know the existing relationships between the Jondrettes and the father and daughter, although we as readers can probably guess. Marius is aware only of the wrath and hatred directed towards the father and daughter by both the Jondrettes.

In a low voice, Jondrette says that his fortune is made: he's had enough of misery. The man will come back at six o'clock to bring 60 francs. There's no one in the house, and the man will give in. If not, they'll fix him, Jondrette says, laughing. As he prepares to leave, he tells his wife to prepare a charcoal stove, while he goes off to buy something in the ironmonger's shop.

Now, even if Marius is unable to fully grasp how the Jondrettes know the father and daughter or why they feel so hostile towards them, he is now certain about what the Jondrettes are planning—or at least that they're planning nothing good.

Chapter 13 Now, Marius sees clearly the nature of these monsters, and knows that the young girl and her father must be saved. It's one o'clock and he has five hours: there's only one thing to be done. He departs for the Rue du Petit-Banquier, where he hears voices from across a wall, two ruffians who are saying that Patron-Minette's assistance means that the affair can't fail. Marius continues on to Rue de Pontoise, No. 14, thinking that if it wasn't for the five francs he had given to the sister, he never would have heard Jondrette's plan and thus been able to save "Ursule."

Once again, Marius finds himself at the intersection of various plots and schemes. He's unable to grasp the significance of all of them, but his presence allows the narrator to better acquaint the reader with the stakes—for instance, the involvement of Patron-Minette in the affair. Again Marius's generosity is mainly valuable to him insofar as it helps him save "Ursule."

Chapter 14 At the address he asks for the police commissary. He's presented to the inspector, a tall man with a thin, firm mouth and searching glance. Marius tells him that a person whom he only knows by sight is about to be tricked into a trap. He, a lawyer, had heard it all, and there would be some accomplices, including Bigrenaille. There was no way of warning the threatened man. Patron-Minette must have had a hand in this, the inspector mutters, and notes that he knows the Gorbeau hovel. The inspector asks Marius to give him his pass-key, and gives Marius two small pistols. He tells him to hide in his chamber so that the Jondrettes think he's gone out: he'll keep watch, and when matters have reached a crisis, he should fire a shot. As Marius leaves, the inspector tells him that his name is Inspector Javert.

Marius takes advantage of his position as a lawyer (not that he's practiced as one) in order to justify his story and gain greater legitimacy as he tells the inspector what is admittedly a somewhat vague tale. The inspector seems to know more than Marius about the dark underworkings of Paris, though he's not acquainted with as many of the facts as the reader. By only revealing at the chapter's end that the inspector is none other than Javert, the narrator introduces a level of dramatic irony. The reader knows that there is a greater danger than what Marius is aware of.

Chapter 15 A few moments later, Bossuet and Courfeyrac are ascending the Rue Mouffetard when they see Marius. They're about to call out to him when they realize that he's following a man with a gray cap—in fact, Marius is following Jondrette. He sees him emerge from a shop holding a huge chisel. Then he returns to his chamber alone.

As usual, the narrator rapidly shifts perspectives and points of view, such that the reader gains an almost bird's-eye view of what is happening in this particular neighborhood of Paris, where the stakes of Jondrette's plan seem to be rising.

Chapter 16 At five o'clock, Marius's heart is beating hard, and only the feeling of the hard pistols in his pocket make it seem like this isn't a dream. Jondrette has just returned, and he tells his wife that the mouse-trap is set. He orders his daughter to go into the neighbor's room to see whether he's in. Marius crawls silently under the bed, and the eldest daughter walks into the room. She smiles into the mirror, humming as she looks at herself and calling over to her father that she's looking under the bed and furniture, and there's no one there. She shuts the door behind her.

Already Marius has changed from a silent observer to an active participant in this affair, thanks to his feelings for the young "Ursule" girl. Here, Marius is saved by the adolescent vanity of the eldest Jondrette girl, who would rather look at herself in the mirror than fully follow her father's instructions to seek out every possible obstruction to his careful plot.

Chapter 17 Marius springs back up to the peep-hole, and sees the hovel entirely illuminated by the reflection from the burning charcoal stove in the fireplace. The chisel bought by Jondrette that day is heating in the charcoal, and by the door is a heap of old iron and a heap of ropes. The hovel is the most isolated chamber in the most isolated house in Paris's most deserted boulevard: ideal for a crime.

The various strands of Jondrette's preparation for the "crime" begin to take on ominous proportions, as Marius has to wonder what the charcoal-heated chisel will be used for. The narrator suggests just how isolated the darkest corners of Parisian existence can be.


Jondrette tells his wife to fetch two chairs from the neighbor's room. Marius has no time to hide, but he's leaning against the wall in shadow. The wife comes in, takes the two chairs without looking up, and departs without seeing him. Jondrette then sends his wife downstairs to keep watch. His own scowling, conniving face is **illuminated** by candlelight.

Marius is once again saved by the absent-mindedness of the Jondrette women, suggesting that they lack the father's totally careful, conniving nature. Here light serves a somewhat different purpose than usual, exposing Jondrette's true character in his face.

Chapter 18 Six o'clock strikes, and Jondrette begins to pace. Then M. Leblanc arrives and lays the sixty francs on the table. Leblanc sits down, and Marius feels horror but no fear, thinking he'll be able to stop Jondrette whenever he wants.

Marius believes himself to be in a position of power, given that he holds several pistols and knows Javert to be just outside, but the reader realizes that there is a greater danger.

*Chapter 2*0 Leblanc asks after the younger, wounded girl, and Jondrette says she's very bad, but will return shortly from the hospital with her wounds dressed. Jondrette launches back into his complaints about his descent into wretchedness, for which he is not to blame. As he speaks, Marius notices a man in a vest with no shirt, tattooed arms, and face smeared with black, enter the room. Leblanc asks who it is, Jondrette says it's a neighbor. He says he has a painting to sell, a picture of great value. Leblanc is clearly beginning to feel a bit uneasy as Jondrette shows him the painting, and his glance returns to the other end of the room, where four grim-looking men are now sitting on the bed.

Jondrette once again takes on his theatrical persona, taking advantage of what he sees as the inevitability of his triumph to listen to himself prattle on and await the entrance of the Patron-Minette men. With their faces smeared with black, these men's disguises are meant to conceal their true identity, but they also underline their acquaintance with evil by suggesting they are emerging from the depths of society, where darkness accumulates like sediment.


Jondrette sweetly asks Leblanc for 1,000 crowns for the picture. Leblanc springs up. In a plaintive tone, Jondrette continues to talk about his misery, with his eye fixed on the door. Suddenly, with no transition whatsoever, the man draws himself up, lunges towards Leblanc and cries, "Do you know me?"

"Leblanc" can clearly tell that something's wrong, but immediately Jondrette switches registers: from a swindling attempt to wring money from him, to delivering a dramatic revelation from the past.

Chapter 20 The door has just opened, and three masked men enter. Jondrette asks if everything's ready, and they say it is. Leblanc has turned pale, and is scrutinizing the room around him. Three of the original men arm themselves with the irons and place themselves across the entrance. Marius raises his hand towards the ceiling, preparing to shoot his pistol. Jondrette remarks that Leblanc doesn't recognize him: Leblanc looks him straight in the face and says no. Jondrette advances towards him and exclaims that he is the inn-keeper Thenardier. Leblanc's face flushes, but he says he still does not know him.

It's not entirely clear whether Jondrette is more interested in exposing "Leblanc's" identity, getting money out of him, or taking revenge on him for the past—or a combination of all three. The stranger, as we know, must step gingerly in this situation, as once again, his past has returned to haunt him, and his ability to establish a new life for himself and Cosette is threatened. His only recourse is to refuse identification with the past.

Meanwhile, Marius is trembling in every limb, and almost drops his pistol. This man is the one he's sought in vain, his father's savior, who now he realizes is only a ruffian. Now he's at the point of having the man seized and delivered to the executioner, precisely the opposite of what his father had asked. It is a mockery of his father's last wish, and yet, shuddering, he knows that if he doesn't fire, Leblanc will be sacrificed. Should he ignore his father's testament or allow for a crime to happen? He feels that he's going mad, and his knees give way.

Marius—the one who can save Leblanc, though only at the expense of allowing Javert to barge in (a potentiality that may prove even more harmful)—finds himself strung between totally opposing moral obligations. Like Valjean having to decide whether to sacrifice himself for Champmathieu or remain in charge of a newly thriving town, Marius understands that there's no real correct path—only a choice between evils.

Meanwhile, Thenardier is pacing in frenzied triumph, crowing that it was the old man who came to his inn in 1823 and carried off Fantine's child from him—a sanctimonious child-stealer who stole a girl from whom he could have extracted enough to live on his whole life. Now he's taking his revenge, and he laughs at the man's gullibility in going along with his ruse. Thenardier pauses, panting, and Leblanc says only that he is mistaken—he is a poor man rather than a millionaire, and Thenardier must only be a villain. Thenardier cries that rich men call people like him villains, only because he hasn't had enough to eat. He was at Waterloo, he claims, where he saved a general, a nameless general who was no better than the rest, and now he is owed all the money he can get.

Now the reader is able to make the explicit connection between Thenardier, Jean Valjean, and "Leblanc," even if Marius himself remains in the dark. For Thenardier, anyone who prevents him from extracting as much money as he can is a "criminal." His argument that he's only considered a villain because he's not able to get enough to eat is, for the narrator, a weak one. The narrator has shown the truth of such a statement for other characters, but the book generally stresses complexity and nuance, and does so here by refusing to grant Thenardier the status of society's innocent victim.

Marius shudders at Thenardier's avowal, and at the reproach against his father. Marius now has no more doubt on his identity. He looks at the picture that Thenardier had told Leblanc to purchase: he can recognize a battleground and a man carrying another—it's Pontmercy and Thenardier at Waterloo.

In growing convinced that Thenardier is who he says he is, Marius is both resolved in and more troubled by what he should do, given that his father's savior is not a hero but in fact a despicable villain.

Leblanc has followed all Thenardier's movements. Suddenly he overturns the table and chair and leaps into the window. He's half out by the time the six men drag him back in. Bigrenaille lifts a lead bludgeon. Marius silently asks his father to forgive him as he prepares to shoot the pistol, when suddenly Thenardier shouts not to harm Leblanc. Leblanc lashes out at Thenardier, sending him tumbling across the room, and manages to overthrow two other men before four others seize him and tie him to the bed. When Thenardier calms down, he begins to speak to Leblanc again, noting that he has not uttered any cry. It must be because he doesn't want the police to come—he must be hiding something. They should thus be able to come to an understanding.

Even outnumbered seven to one, Leblanc nearly manages to escape, a testament to the remarkable strength developed in the galleys, which he's employed before to more benign uses. Now, though, he's trapped, and Marius nearly decides against loyalty to his father—though he ultimately is saved from having to. Thenardier has shrewdly picked up on Leblanc's strategy, familiar as he is with the ruses necessary to escape the police—another example of the complexity of crime and ethics, since Thenardier and Valjean do still have some things in common.

The man remains impassive, and Marius admires his stoicism and refusal to despair. Thenardier says he doesn't want to ruin the man: he's asking only for 200,000 francs, which can't be a huge amount for the man. He places a piece of paper and pen in front of Leblanc and tells him to write a letter to his daughter, "the Lark," saying he's in absolute need of her, and she must come immediately. He signs it Urbain Fabre. Thenardier seizes the letter and sends his wife out with several of the men to fetch the girl.

Given the stranger's behavior when he took Cosette away in Montfermeil, Thenardier is confident that he can extract a high sum from him—a goal that he equates in importance with recovering his pride and taking revenge on the man. Cosette, whom the Montfermeil residents called "the Lark," is the lynchpin in this carefully plotted ruse.

Only five of the men remain. They don't seem to take pleasure in the crime, instead acting with ennui. They wait in silence. Marius wonders whom "the Lark" could be, now knowing that the "U" refers to her father. In any case, he knows that if he continues to wait he'll see her come, and will give his life for her.

The narrator suggests that for seasoned criminals like the Patron-Minette gang, darkness becomes habitual, and crime has less to do with the thrill of the act than with the maintenance of a certain ethical status and lifestyle.

Thenardier tells Leblanc that he assumes the Lark really is his daughter. The girl will follow his wife to a fiacre, and the men will lead her to a place where she will be released as soon as the 200,000 francs are handed over: if not, his comrade will take care of her. Marius is struck dumb, unable to decide if he should shoot the pistol. But the man of crime is out of reach, and he worries that the Lark will be killed if he has Thenardier arrested.

Thenardier believes he's outsmarted Leblanc, taking advantage of what he knows to be the man's love for Cosette in order to get what he wants. For Marius, similarly, his love for "the Lark" is stronger than his desire to have Thenardier arrested, whatever his transformed opinions on his father's "savior" are.

The Thenardier woman rushes into the room, shouting, "False address!" The old man has duped him, she cries. Marius breathes freely. Thenardier quietly asks the prisoner what he expected to gain through a false address, and the prisoner cries out, "Time!" He shakes off his bonds, grabs the red-hot chisel from the fire, and brandishes it. Later, a large sou piece cut into a knife (Valjean's hidden tool to escape his chains) would be found in the apartment. But he's still held to the bed by one leg.

Once again, Thenardier is at least partially outsmarted by Valjean, who uses all the tools and disguises at his disposal—including tricks probably learned in prison, such as the ability to hide a small knife in an inconspicuous coin. The narrator thus suggests that, even as his crimes continue to haunt him, Valjean can still justifiably gain from his past.

The prisoner says that all these men are wretches, but his life is not worth defending. He lays the burning chisel on the bare flesh of his arm, and Marius reels in horror, but the man looks serenely and without hatred at Thenardier. He tells the wretches not to fear him more than he fears them, and hurls the chisel from his wound through the window, remaining disarmed. The husband and wife deliberate on what to do, and Marius hears them say in a low voice that they can only cut his throat. Marius has been struggling to find some way of uniting his contradictory impulses, but now realizes that there is none. Suddenly he has an idea: he sees a sheet of paper written that morning by the eldest of the Thenardier daughters, saying "The bobbies are here," and thrusts it through the crevice. The wife claims she saw it fall through the window, and they see that it is Eponine's handwriting. Thenardier cries that they must leave through the window. He heads that way, but Bigrenaille seizes him and says they should draw lots to see who will go first. Thenardier exclaims that he's mad. Suddenly, they hear a voice behind them: it's Javert.

Valjean's motivation in laying the burning chisel on his arm is not entirely clear. In choosing suffering, he may be showing those around him that he doesn't fear pain or death, but rather wants to escape for other reasons—most likely having to do with his mandate to love and protect Cosette. In any case, this unexpected move proves shocking to the Thenardiers, and gives Valjean a bit more time before being overwhelmed by the other men. For the first time, Marius actively intrudes in the scene, finally conquering his ethically-undecided conscience and deciding on the side of "Leblanc" and "the Lark"—the side that also, according to the narrator's perspective, has the advantage of lying on the side of light and moral goodness. This is a position in which, interestingly, loyalty plays little part.

Chapter 21 At nightfall, Javert had ambushed the house on all sides, seizing Azelma who was outside the house, but not Eponine, who had escaped. He had been waiting for the agreed-upon signal, but finally grew impatient and used Marius's pass-key to go upstairs himself. He enters the room and tells the men there are 15 policemen—they shouldn't try to fight. Thenardier points his pistol at Javert, who says he'll only misfire: he shoots, and does misfire. A squad of policemen, armed, rushes in and handcuffs all the men. Madame Thenardier rears up, shielding her husband with her body, as she grasps a paving-stone above her head and threatens to crush whomever approaches. Javert advances, and she throws the stone: he ducks, and then handcuffs them both.

Javert, as we well know by now, will stop at nothing to find and arrest criminals. The Patron-Minette gang is a particularly enticing catch, operating as it does as a kind of underground web of crime. The narrator has suggested before that Javert's single-minded pursuit of legal justice is not as unquestionably ethical as it might seem, but here, Javert clearly occupied the moral high ground when compared to the Thenardiers, who are growing increasingly desperate (though Madame does show striking loyalty to her husband).

Javert greets the six handcuffed ruffians merrily, greeting them all by name. Then he asks for the gentlemen's prisoner to step forward. The old man, however, has disappeared through the window—the rope ladder is still shaking. Javert grits his teeth and says that he must have been the most valuable of all.

As we're aware, perhaps the only thing worse for Valjean than being caught by Thenardier would be being found by Javert. Javert may not know who slipped through his fingers, but he's aware of the missed opportunity.

Chapter 22 The following day, a small boy, pale and clad in rags, is walking up the Boulevard de l'Hopital. He jostles against an old woman, whom he exclaims he mistook for a huge dog. She straightens in a fury, but the boy slips away and continues to the Gorbeau hovel, where he tries to kick in the door. The boy says he's come to see his ancestors. The old woman, Madame de Bourgon, says no one is there anymore: they are all at different prisons. The boy scratches his head, and turns on his heel, singing a ditty.

This boy, we're meant to assume, is the same as the "street urchin" whom the narrator described in detail in an earlier section of the book—a ruffian but also a child, and so to be considered with compassion. It's through this "gamin," a classic Parisian type, that we learn of the disintegration of the Thenardier family.

VOLUME 4, BOOK 1: A FEW PAGES OF HISTORY

Chapter 1 The narrator describes 1831 and 1832 as two revolutionary mountains, crossed by social masses and even civilizations. The Restoration had been an intermediate phase, where heroism and ambitions had dwindled and people sought only a shelter. The Bourbon royal family, which had returned to France after Napoleon, believed it still possessed divine right, rather than simply being a part of history. Therefore the Restoration dismissed individual sovereignty and liberty, thus leading to its fall. But the nation had grown used to calm, intelligent discussion, and the slow, careful growth of liberty of conscience, speech, and press, at least until 1830.

It's helpful to keep in mind a timeline of French history here: after Napoleon's definitive fall in 1815, monarchy returned to France in the Restoration period. The narrator suggests that the mistake was to think that nothing had changed since the old regime before the Revolution of 1789. This assumption, which ignored even slight progress, made the Restoration's fall (in 1830) inevitable, according to the narrator.

The Bourbons left the throne without authority, even though with gravity; their misfortune had no majesty. The July Revolution that did away with Charles X had many friends, but also enemies that witnessed it with fright and wrath. In this revolution, according to the narrator, right overthrew fact; it was mild, beautiful, and pure. The task of wise men, indeed, is to do away with the conflict between right and fact.

The narrator contrasts the "fact"—the powerful monarchy that usually quashes revolutionary movements—with "right," or the social, political, and ethical justice of the poorer classes rising up against the Bourbons (even as the narrator doesn't claim the Bourbons were entirely evil).

Chapter 2 But the Revolution of 1830 soon skidded to a halt, and was arrested midway by the bourgeoisie, which Hugo defines only as an interest group, which stops being a class once the interest is satisfied. Between 1830 and 1848 is a pause of progress during Louis-Philippe's reign, a kind of "half-throne."

The narrator suggests that, while "right" did temporarily win out in 1830, not much changed between then and the much more significant revolution of 1848. He suggests that progress can be "paused" even if never wholly vanquished.


Chapter 3 The narrator notes that Louis-Philippe, a member of the House of Orleans, was sober, patient, and morally upstanding, bourgeois through and through. He was patriotic, but preferred his family to his country. He valued domination more than dignity, and treated other nations in different ways depending on the moment. He was not very attentive, but a decent observer. He knew dates and details well but was ignorant of passions and inner aspirations of the crowd. He was charming but lacked majesty—his manners were of the old regime and his habits of the new. He was transition embodied. His fault was that he was too much of a paternal king, too concerned with private over public matters. In '93 he had witnessed the trial of Louis XVI, and the Revolution had left a great trace in him. Still, too little time has passed (at the year of Hugo's writing) before history can truly pronounce a definitive judgment on the king. At least as a man, he was kindly and good.

In the classic style of Hugo, we are treated to a detailed physiognomic analysis of the king that reigned between 1830 and 1848, whom many historians have deemed the "bourgeois king" because of how much he reflected the values of this class. Although the narrator had said the bourgeoisie cannot be defined as anything other than a group of interests, here he fleshes out more of what "bourgeois" means: morally upstanding but somewhat empty, charming instead of passionate, and inconsistent in its values. The narrator refrains from passing judgment on this "transitional" monarch, certain that history will accomplish that goal for him.


Chapter 4 The narrator wants to make clear that Louis-Philippe had attained power through revolutionary change; his position had been offered to him. But democracy and royalty could never be reconciled. The July Revolution had various interpretations within France. The old parties thought because of the right to revolt, one could revolt against revolutions, even though that meant it would be the king, not the people, revolting. Revolutions, unlike revolt, spring from necessity. Yet many legitimists attacked the revolution's change from a Bourbon to Orleanist king, whereas the republicans struggled against the persistence of having a king at all.

The main point in this passage is that the July Revolution, which resulted in a compromise, ended up satisfying no one at all. The legitimists wanted a return to the "legitimate" Bourbon line of kings, while the republicans were unsatisfied with what they saw as a mere change in royal bloodline, rather than a true transformation of society. The narrator suggests that it was inevitable for this compromise to fall apart—laws of history wouldn't allow it to stand.

Meanwhile, the questions of poverty, education, prostitution, wealth, consumption, etc., all continued without being resolved, with thinkers considering them abstractedly, instead asking themselves material questions about man's happiness. Socialist thought led from these questions: how to produce wealth and how to share it—how to make man happy, citizens free, and nations great out of social prosperity. Capitalism and communism deal with only one part of these questions, and socialism attempted to unite them. But these ideas all coexisted in the years after 1830. Meanwhile, people remained without bread, foreign affairs grew more hazardous, and discontent grew as ideas were fostered.

The narrator seems to look with some disapproval on the various ideas and theories being tossed around in the years after the July Revolution. Capitalism, communism, and socialism all have their positive aspects, according to Hugo, but each has its own drawbacks as well. Furthermore, none of these ideas were even really being put into practice, while the material, physical problems plaguing Parisians and other French people continued.

Chapter 5 By April 1832, discontent was rapidly brewing. In Paris, this took place largely in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, where "subversive" pamphlets were read in bars and news of anti-government plots spread. Scraps of conversation and vague plans could be heard throughout neighborhoods. Then more material evidence began to arise, like a report noting the need for sulphur, charcoal, and water, or the discovery by some children playing in the Champ-de-Mars of material for the preparation of gun cartridges. Secret societies began to spread over the country, such as the Society of the Rights of Man (dating from the Revolution), the Society of Action, and the Society of Equal Workingmen. In Paris, the Society of the Friends of the ABC continued to meet in the Café Musain.

By prefacing his remarks about the discontent of April 1832 with a historical summary of the politics of the time and the intellectual ideas of the moment, the narrator seems to suggest that these revolutionary ideas were justifiable and even necessary. For many of Paris's and France's poorest citizens, little had changed for the better in all these political upheavals. The spread of these ideas is described almost like a virus, growing contagious and expanding exponentially, in one way to think about how revolutionary ideas gain currency.

The neighborhood of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine was in a state of agitation, especially since it was working-class and received shocks of commercial crises and strikes. The wine-shops of this area were particularly notorious as places of revolutionary thought. In '93, men here hurled themselves on Paris seeking an end to oppression and tyranny, social equality, and progress. They acted savagely but in pursuit of civilization. The narrator notes that he would prefer barbarians of civilization to civilized men of barbarism. But he claims there is a third way: progress with a "gentle slope," which God takes care of.

Hugo is far from straightforward concerning his opinions about revolution and political uprising. On the one hand, many French citizens' political leanings (not to mention the band of Courfeyrac and friends) have been described sympathetically, yet even as the narrator stresses his defense of their savage behavior, he suggests that another path—one of gradual progress—is even better.

Chapter 6 Around this time, Enjolras is leading a meeting at the Café Musain. He asks how many can be counted on to battle against the army, and directs his friends to take care of certain neighborhoods. One is missing—the Barrière du Maine—where artists' and sculptors' studios are found, though the artists seem less interested in revolution than before. He tells Grantaire to go to these artists' café, Richefeu's, to try to talk them into joining forces.

From a sweeping historical and political scope, we now return to the miniscule workings of one particular political group: the Friends of the ABC at the Café Musain, or Marius's friends and colleagues (though he's decreased his political involvement since falling in love with Cosette).


After everyone leaves, Enjolras wanders the café, wondering if this is the moment to act. He asks himself if he should go to Richefeu's himself and see how Grantaire is getting on. Reaching the door, he peers through the smoke to his comrade, who is simply playing dominos with his friends.

Here the narrator interjects a bit of humor into a stormy political situation. Enjolras may be single-minded in his pursuit of freedom through uprising, but others are more interested in youthful entertainment.

VOLUME 4, BOOK 2: EPONINE

Chapter 1 After witnessing Javert's ambush, Marius goes to visit Courfeyrac and spends the night there. The next morning, he pays the rest of his rent and has his furniture carted off in a hand-cart, so when Javert returns to question Marius, the porter says he's moved away. For Marius, the house now only holds memories of wickedness, and besides, he doesn't want to have to testify against Thenardier. Each week he borrows five francs from Courfeyrac and gives them to the clerk's office for Thenardier.

Marius is still struggling to wrap his head around his discovery of Thenardier's identity. He is trying to understand the his wickedness while still reluctant to condemn the man who (Marius still believes) saved his father. Marius is even willing to go into debt, borrowing money from Courfeyrac, for Thenardier's sake and to honor his father's memory.

Marius is also heartbroken not to have learned much more about the young girl, the Lark. He stops working because of his passion and torments, and descends into poverty once again—poverty now not noble but idle. His only solace is to think that perhaps she still loves him, given that one glance.

Having renamed "Ursule" "the Lark," Marius is still no closer to finding the woman he loves. Here, though, the narrator suggests that love can also be dangerously numbing, rather than always a force for good.

Sometimes Marius wanders around the Latin Quarter, down the Rue de la Glacière, and then to the river of the Gobelins, where there's an ancient-looking green meadow. Once, when there's a passers-by, Marius asks him the name of this spot: he answers that it's the Lark's meadow, a name from French history. Every day, Marius returns to the meadow.

The narrator situates Marius within the Paris of students, centered around the Latin Quarter but extending south and west to other, less developed areas of Paris, though ones that are still obviously rich with French history.


Chapter 2 Javert is still convinced that the prisoner who escaped was the most valuable. Montparnasse and Claquesous had managed to escape as well. Javert decides to put another Patron-Minette man, Brujon, among other men rather than alone in prison, so that he might spill secrets. Soon, he finds out that Brujon has been managing to send messages to several Parisian addresses, probably regarding a crime. He's seen late at night writing something on his bed, so he's put in solitary confinement, but on the next morning a "postilion," a piece of bread that is molded into a kind of catapult, is hurled from the prison yard into the next courtyard, reaching Babet, another Patron-Minette character. It holds a roll of paper noting that there's an affair in the Rue Plumet.

For Javert, there is always a greater injustice to combat, as he treats his mandate to track down and put away criminals as an obsession to which there's no end. Even when he arrests Brujon and the others and locks them away in prison, Javert is eager to find other members of the web of crime (and is certain that it is a vast web) by tracking the prisoner's moves. Still, the narrator notes how adept Brujon and the others are at navigating Paris's underworld—not only its alleys and dark corners, but also its institutions like prisons.

Around this time, Eponine is released from prison, and she lurks and spies around the Rue Plumet, before delivering a biscuit back to Babet's mistress (meaning that there's nothing to be done).

Eponine is not, the narrator suggests, evil herself, but rather has been manipulated by her father into assisting his and others' crimes.

Chapter 3 Though Marius no longer seeks out friends, he sometimes runs into M. Mabeuf, who is more wretched than ever but maintains a corner in the Jardin des Plantes to experiment with his plants. When they pass each other in the street, they only nod to each other in a melancholy way.

In Paris, misery is far from uncommon, and yet urban misery has the effect of isolating people from each other, so that neither Marius nor Mabeuf is entirely aware of the other's history.

One evening M. Mabeuf's daily routine is shaken. He's reading and worriedly surveying his plants, parched from the lack of rain. Suddenly a female voice asks Mabeuf if he would like her to water the garden for him: it's a tall, slim girl by the shrubbery. She does so, and Mabeuf blesses her, tearing up. She asks if he'll do her a favor in return: tell her where Marius lives. He has forgotten, but says he often goes to the meadow of the lark. When she leaves, he says to himself that the apparition looked like a goblin.

The narrator has just emphasized the moral and emotional isolation that an urban environment can prompt, but this is a reminder that Paris—in which thousands of people are clustered in a relatively small area of land—is also home to remarkable coincidences and constantly crossed paths.

Chapter 4 A few days afterward, Marius heads off to the Lark's meadow, where he spends more time than at home, dreaming of "her." Then he hears a girl cry, "Here he is!" and recognizes Eponine, the elder Thenardier daughter, whose name he now knows. She is dressed in even shabbier rags than before, and yet has grown more beautiful. She exclaims that she's hunted for him since she's been out of jail.

It's clear that Eponine was the girl who had sought Marius's address from Mabeuf in exchange for doing him a favor. By showing that she's grown more beautiful, the narrator suggests that there is now a greater moral integrity in Eponine than there was before her time in prison.

Eponine continues to chatter, but then her eyes cloud and she says Marius doesn't seem happy to see her. She could force him to look glad, she says: she has something for him. She asks him to promise he'll smile, then says she has the address of the young lady. He turns pale and seizes her hand, asking her to take him there. He asks her to swear not to give this address to her father, calling her "Eponine." She's delighted that he knows her name and agrees. She tells him to follow her, but at a distance, so that he won't be seen next to a woman "like her." Marius tries to give her five francs, but she lets it fall, saying gloomily that she doesn't want his money.

Marius is almost willfully blind to Eponine's emotional turmoil throughout this passage. She's obviously done all she can to accomplish the favor he'd asked of her because of how much she loves him, yet she knows that her favor can only bring Marius closer to another woman, the one he *is in love with. Love can be purifying, it's suggested here, but also excruciatingly painful, a factor that threatens to unravel its generally redemptive status in the novel.*

VOLUME 4, BOOK 3: THE HOUSE IN THE RUE PLUMET

Chapter 1 A small house in the Rue Plumet with a garden of about an acre and a half used to belong to the mistress of a chief justice in parliament in the last century (the 18th). The house has a secret back entrance in the Rue de Babylone, so that the chief justice could come and go as he pleased. After '93 the house had fallen slowly into ruin, but towards the end of the Restoration it began to be occupied again.

The narrator describes in detail another hidden corner of Paris, this one geographically located within the real, historical city. This anecdote gestures towards the scandals of pre-revolutionary Paris, but its main function is to show how architecture can bear the imprint of a city's history.

In October 1829, an older man had rented the house in the sorry state it was in, and after some repairs moved in with a young girl and elderly maid: Valjean, Cosette, and a woman named Toussaint, whom Valjean had saved from poverty. At the convent, he had been happy, reflecting that Cosette would probably become a nun and he could thus grow old with her. But then he wondered if he was being selfish: perhaps she should see the world before she renounced it. Once Fauchelevent died, he begged the prioress to accept 5,000 francs for them to leave—for Cosette's education, since she wouldn't immediately become a nun. He left the convent with his little valise (traveling bag), whose key he keeps on his person at all times. Cosette laughs at him for this peculiarity.

Once again, Valjean moves from one battered house to another, always attempting to keep himself and Cosette one step ahead of his past. As has been the case before, Valjean struggles between wanting to keep someone he loves (in M.-sur-M., the townspeople, and here, Cosette) close to him, and asking himself whether he's acting selfishly in doing so. Here we also have a hint that Valjean does to an extent keep a part of the past with him (through the valise).

Valjean now lives under the name Ultime Fauchelevent. He has two other Paris dwellings, so that he might be able to slip away and not be caught unprepared like he was the night at the Thenardiers'.

Valjean retains some of the tricks and deceptions more befitting members of the Patron-Minette gang, but here he uses them in the interest of protecting Cosette.

Chapter 2 At the Rue Plumet Valjean tells Toussaint that Cosette is the mistress of the house. Cosette manages their small budget, and each day they walk in the Luxembourg and then go to give alms or charity to the poor in the nearby neighborhoods. Since he had been included in the 1831 census, Valjean was required to patrol as part of the National Guard three or four times a year (he didn't want to tell anyone that he was over 60). Toussaint venerates Valjean: when a butcher tells her that he's a "queer man," she replies that he's a saint. Valjean leaves the Rue Plumet garden uncultivated so as not to attract attention. This is perhaps a mistake, as the narrator notes.

Though Valjean lives modestly in terms of his own spending, he is wont to spoil Cosette—if not financially then in the way he worships and lavishes attention on her. Valjean is not so cautious about revealing his identity as to give up on his visits of charity, visits for which he'd become known in the past as the "beggar that gives alms." This chapter allows us to see Valjean's delicate balance between concealing his past and maintaining a high moral standard.

Chapter 3 The garden at the Rue Plumet is overgrown and mysterious, with a stone bench in one corner and several old statues. It is like a thicket or forest more than a garden. The revolution, the crumbling of old fortunes, and forgetfulness of forty years have rendered the place wild. The narrator muses about the interconnectedness of natural things, and the way in which nature is constantly self-fulfilling and self-rejuvenating, all as a result of God's will.

Again, we are meant to note how much history—revolution and the transformations it enacted among so many in Paris—is directly and materially visible even in such supposedly insignificant spaces as a small garden tucked away in the corner of the city.


Chapter 4 This garden has become the ideal place for love to show itself. Cosette had left the convent as an ungainly, homely 14-year-old, having been taught religion, history, and some music, but still largely ignorant. This was charming but also dangerous, the narrator notes, since women should be enlightened, even if slowly and gradually. In particular, Cosette had never had a mother to explain to her certain things about the world. Upon leaving the convent, Cosette had fastened onto the Rue Plumet garden's romantic mysteries, and she would play in it often.

Once again, the narrator critiques the social and political place of the modern convent, which in the novel's view is stuck in the past and no longer able to participate in human progress. Part of this progress, according to Hugo, is the education of women, an essential means of lifting all people out of poverty and misery, though women's dismal fates are particularly emphasized.


Cosette adores Valjean. She enjoys asking him why he prefers to keep a cold, severe room and eat black bread, while her room is heated and has carpets, and her meals are far nicer. She vaguely remembers Valjean having rescued her from a forest where she had gone to fetch water. Valjean never tells Cosette her mother's name, perhaps fearing that a shadow would be cast over their ideal life. He thanks God for having allowed him, a wretch, to be so loved.

Though Cosette occupies a unique place in Valjean's heart, even she is not welcomed in to share the darkest secrets of his past. He keeps this burden not only for his own safety but also out of love for her. Valjean still struggles with whether he truly deserves such love, which for him would mean that his past crimes have been redeemed.


Chapter 5 One day Cosette looks at herself in the mirror and realizes with a shock that she's somewhat pretty. The next morning, she tells herself she was imagining things. But then she overhears Toussaint telling Valjean how beautiful she's grown, and she feels a secret delight. Yet Valjean feels wounded by the change. He only wants Cosette to continue to love him; he fears she'll be stolen away from him.

Cosette is described as charming and loving, but also subject to the same vanities of any teenage girl (perhaps more so, given, as the narrator has mentioned, the lack of education for girls at the time). Valjean continues to struggle between selfless and selfish versions of his love for her.

Soon Cosette, whom Valjean never refuses anything, develops a taste for fashion and style and becomes a well-dressed Parisienne. She begins asking Valjean to go out, whereas before she had preferred to remain with him inside. She has lost the grace of not knowing her beauty, but she's gained great charm.

As Cosette grows up, she naturally begins to grow away from her singlemindedly adoring relationship to Valjean. Though she still loves him, this gradual move towards independence wounds him.

Chapter 6 Thus Cosette and Marius were drawn together by destiny. The narrator notes that the idea of love at first glance has grown suspect, but claims that this is how people fall in love. Marius's glance had allowed Cosette to realize how beautiful he also was. Shaken by his coldness one day, she had decided to take revenge by walking a little closer and teasing him—but that day their glance changed everything, and they began to adore each other. Cosette loves so passionately because she does not really know what love is, having spent so many years in the convent.

Throughout this chapter the narrator is unclear on how exactly he defines love, and what it means in the context of Cosette and Marius. In some ways, he defends their love at first sight, but in other ways, he seems to suggest that love is only possible within a broader web of social relationships, so that Cosette, lacking such social knowledge, is not yet ready to truly love.

Chapter 7 Slowly, Valjean begins to notice Marius in the Luxembourg. Only once does he mention him, saying that the young man has a pedantic air. Cosette only repeats, "That young man!" as if she's looking at him for the first time. Valjean then thinks it was he who pointed Marius out to her. Valjean concludes that the boy is in love with Cosette, who doesn't know he exists. Valjean had thought he could no longer feel malevolence, but he now hates Marius. He despairs that he'll lose Cosette, his life and joy, just because a young man wanted to lounge around in a park.

On the one hand, Valjean's ignorance of Cosette's true feelings is a poignant reminder of their gap in age and life experience. In addition, it's suggested that Valjean is still capable of some of the violent emotions of his past, even if he now can refrain from acting upon them—and, crucially, this hatred is somehow motivated by love.


After realizing that Marius has followed them home, Valjean stops the trips to the Luxembourg. Cosette doesn't complain or ask questions, but grows sad, and Valjean, who has no experience of this kind of misery, doesn't understand. Finally, after 3 months, he asks Cosette if she'd like to go to the Luxembourg: a ray of light illuminates her face, and she says yes, but Marius is no longer there. The next day she sadly responds no to his suggestion that they go to the park. Valjean is hurt but also stunned by her gentleness.

It does seem as though Valjean might be actively refusing to read the signs by stopping the visits to the park and then feigning ignorance at the reason for Cosette's despondency. Valjean continues to love and admire Cosette throughout this episode, and is always able to pick out what he finds remarkable in her character.

Meanwhile, Cosette feels anguished at Marius's disappearance, though she tries to put on a sweet face for Valjean. For the first time, they suffer side by side, though without anger, and smiling all along.

Cosette and Valjean may want different things, but the narrator stresses how careful the two are not to hurt each other, in a strong sign of love.

Chapter 8 Since youth has its own radiance even in suffering, Valjean is more unhappy than Cosette is, especially as he lacks a total proof that Cosette is in fact slipping away from him, but he also isn't sure that she'd stay for him. Sometimes Cosette and Valjean rise early to walk and see the sun rise, and they continue these strolls even after they've grown melancholy. One October morning in 1831, they set out near the Barrière du Maine, as the sun is beginning to light up the peaceful boulevards.

During this period, while Valjean and Cosette remain committed and loyal to each other, there is also much more than ever before that they cannot find a way to talk about. Rising early to take strolls together is one way to recall and mimic their earlier intimacy, even in a new and different period in Cosette's life.

Cosette exclaims that someone is coming towards them: it's seven wagons, fixed to four horses each. Twenty-four men are tied to each truck, wearing iron collars and all attached to one long chain. Their clothing is battered and ragged, their faces blotchy and grim. As the sun rises, the **light** seems to set fire to this mournful procession, which suddenly makes it more jovial, and the men begin to sing. An old woman among the passers-by points to them and tells a five-year-old next to her to let this be a warning for him. Others in the crowd curse at them gleefully.

Cosette has no knowledge of galleys or prisoners. She might as well be one of the passers-by, for whom this procession may be ominous but is also a kind of detached entertainment. The narrator contrasts the dark faces and clothing of the prisoners to the harsh light shone on them, as if allowing the crowd to see just what moral depths the prisoners have descended into.

Valjean seems to be seeing a vision. He tries to escape but is unable to move his feet. Cosette is terrified, though she doesn't understand what's happening. Valjean says that these are convicts going to the galleys. Trembling, Cosette asks if they are still men. He replies, "sometimes." On the way home, Cosette plies him with questions about convicts. That evening, Valjean hears her say to herself in a low voice that she should die just from seeing a convict like that approach her alone. The next few days are festival days in Paris, so Valjean takes Cosette to see them, and hopes she'll forget what she'd seen before. But a few days later, Cosette is playing with flowers in her garden, seeming joyful and without a care, when she suddenly asks Valjean what the galleys are like.

In this passage, Valjean's past and present brutally collide, as all that he's attempted to conceal from Cosette is now introduced to her directly. Cosette may not know Valjean's relationship to what she's seen, but what proves heartbreaking for him is how she views the convicts—as dark, evil creatures whom she has no hope of understanding, much less embracing as fellow human beings. That the innocent Cosette is capable of such judgment underlines how widely spread societal condemnation of prisoners is.

VOLUME 4, BOOK 4: SUCCOR FROM BELOW MAY TURN OUT TO BE SUCCOR FROM ON HIGH

Chapter 1 The main joy that now remains to Cosette and Valjean is to carry bread to the hungry and clothing to the cold. On the day following their visit to the Jondrette den, Valjean returns home with a large wound on his arm which looks like a burn, but he explains it away. He stays home for a month with fever but refuses to call the doctor, and is touched by Cosette's care in looking after him. He's so happy to be with her that he doesn't dwell on the horrible discovery of the Thenardiers.

After a long detour, in which the narrator has retrodden events already detailed from Marius's perspective, we now return to the narrative present, where the renewed love and affection of Cosette for Valjean proves more important to him than his near-captures by Thenardier and Javert.

Cosette is content to see her father suffering less and convalescing. As spring comes, she feels happier herself, and one day when she convinces Valjean to spend a full 15 minutes in the garden, she laughs and frolics. He thinks of even thanking the Thenardiers.

Ironically, it's because of what happened to him at the Thenardiers that Valjean has managed to revive Cosette's former affection and love for him.

Chapter 2 One evening little Gavroche has had nothing to eat and wanders out into the village of Austerlitz, past the Salpetrière. He catches sight of an apple-tree in an old garden frequented by two elderly people. He lies in wait, and hears the old woman call out to "Monsieur Mabeuf," who asks "Mother Plutarque" what the matter is: they owe the landlord three quarters' rent. He doesn't seem too worried, even as the old woman lists everything they need and owe. Mabeuf simply says they have nothing.

Gavroche is the small "gamin" or Parisian street urchin, as well as the youngest son of the Thenardiers, whom we've been acquainted with before. Here he functions as an extra set of eyes and ears in Paris, well-versed in the city's nooks and crannies and always happening to find himself in a spot where interesting things are happening.

Gavroche nods off for awhile, and wakes up near twilight, when he spies an elderly bourgeois-looking man next to a slender, almost effeminate young man: the young man is Montparnasse. Gavroche feels compassion for the old man, though he's not sure he can take on Montparnasse himself to protect him. All at once, Montparnasse seizes the old man by the collar, but a moment later it's Montparnasse on the ground, with the old man's knee on his chest. The man tells Montparnasse to get up, and begins to question him, asking why he doesn't work and what he'd like to be. Montparnasse says he's bored by work, he's an idler, and would only like to be a thief.

As we've seen before, we're meant to consider Gavroche with compassion—he may be a troublemaker, but he is good at heart and always remains on the side of the victim. However, in this case it appears that Gavroche has misjudged who the victim is. The "old man"—whose identity the reader has most likely already grasped—treats Montparnasse not with righteous anger but with concern, seeming to be truly interested in why Montparnasse clings to crime.

The man begins to tell Montparnasse that if he declares himself an idler, he should prepare to toil because laziness is the hardest work of all. If he doesn't work, he'll only be a slave: working leads to freedom. He says Montparnasse can easily create a knife out of a sou-piece, hidden away, and he'll be able to cut off chains and do any kind of malice he'd like, but he'll only be a parasite. He says he pities him; he releases Montparnasse and puts his purse in his hand. The old man turns his back and walks away.

The reader in this scene knows more than either Montparnasse or Gavroche. It's an interesting example Valjean chooses, that of a knife in a sou-piece—the trick he himself used against the Thenardiers. Valjean's situation is obviously quite different from Montparnasse's, but his choice suggests that at least on one level Valjean continues to condemn himself as a "parasite."

Montparnasse, amazed, watches the old man walk away. But Gavroche sneaks up to him and manages to put his hand into Montparnasse's back coat pocket. He draws out the purse and hurls it over the hedge to Father Mabeuf, before racing away. Mabeuf is entirely perplexed, while Mother Plutarque says that the purse has fallen from heaven.

Once again, Gavroche places himself solidly on the side of the victim. In Hugo's Paris, everything and everyone is interrelated. This allows Valjean's coins to pass through the Thenardier son's hands and end up with the man who revealed Marius' father's love to him.

VOLUME 4, BOOK 5: THE END OF WHICH DOES NOT RESEMBLE THE BEGINNING

Chapter 1 Cosette's grief has finally begun to ebb. One week, she notices a handsome young officer begin to pass her gate each day. The lieutenant, whose name is Theodule Gillenormand, dismisses his friends when they say that a girl is making eyes at him from the garden. Meanwhile, Marius still despairs about Cosette. He's the sort of person who never emerges from sorrow, unlike Cosette.

Paris, as we've seen at the end of the last Book, is a web of coincidental connections, and here Marius's unknown cousin comes to distract Cosette from the person who's really in love with her. Again Cosette is described as innocent but somewhat flighty, the casualty of a lack of education.

Chapter 2 In April, Valjean takes one of his habitual journeys of one or two days—going somewhere that not even Cosette knows, and usually when money is lacking. It's 10 p.m., and Cosette thinks she hears footsteps in the garden. She looks out the window, but the street is deserted. The next day towards nightfall, she's walking through the garden when the moon rises and illuminates another shadow, a man with a round hat, nearby. She is terrified, but stands up resolutely and turns around. There's no one there.

For Cosette, Valjean's trips are just another one of his peculiarities, which she's accustomed to enough not to question. But without the illuminating presence of Valjean, Cosette finds the shadows and secrets of Paris terrifying rather than inviting, and the city takes on an ominous presence without her adopted father.

The next day Cosette tells Valjean, who's just returned, what happened; though he reassures her he grows anxious himself. Valjean passes the next two nights in the garden. On the third night, Valjean calls down to her: a shadow in the garden made by a sheet iron chimney-pipe does look quite like the shadow of a man with a hat. Cosette doesn't ask herself why this shadow should have retreated in alarm when she looked back at it, and she thinks no more about it.

Valjean may have different reasons for growing alarmed than Cosette does, but such hints no longer make him paranoid enough to want to move apartments, as he's done before. The narrator suggests, however, that there's more to the story than either Valjean or Cosette may know.

Chapter 3 One evening later that month, Valjean has gone out, and Cosette is sitting on the garden bench thinking. She stands up and wanders around the garden, but upon her return, she sees a large stone, which had not been by the bench a moment before. She rushes indoors, asking Toussaint if she's very careful to close the shutters with bars at night. Toussaint says she is, adding how awful it would be for someone to sneak into the bedrooms at night and try to cut their throats. Cosette tells her to be quiet.

Once again, without the calming presence of Valjean, the house on the Rue Plumet, not to mention Paris itself, become a dark, ominous place of secrets and possible dangers for Cosette. This transformation is quite different from how the city "changed" when Cosette became suddenly eager to go outside in her new outfits, wanting to take advantage of her new beauty.

The next day Cosette's fears seem ridiculous, and she thinks she dreamed about the stone. But when she returns to the garden, it's still there. Pale, she lifts it up, and finds an unsealed envelope filled with writing.

Hugo is well acquainted with the style of melodrama, and here uses it to his advantage in evoking an atmosphere of dread.

Chapter 4 The narrator calls love the reduction of the universe to a single being, and the expansion of a single being to God, who lives in all. It was excruciating for Marius not to know the address of his very soul, which the narrator links to the infinite and to spiritual goodness. It is grand to be loved, and grander to love, making one's soul heroic and lofty.

Although Hugo has explored various perspectives on love and its implications for human behavior, here he is firmly on the side of love, stressing its connection to the divine and thus confirming that it can only be good and redeeming.

Chapter 5 Cosette reads the letter, 15 pages long, and daydreams. At one point the handsome officer passes by, but now she finds him hideous. The manuscript seems to reveal to her all of life: love, sorrow, destiny. It's an anonymous love letter, but Cosette knows it could have only been written by one person. All day she feels bewildered, thinking that heavenly chance has brought the young man back to her.

This sudden reveal also uses 19th-century conventions of melodrama in its transformation for Cosette from fear to wonder. She has not, perhaps, been as faithful to Marius as the latter was to her, but the text still underlines her loyalty to Marius by suggesting that she knows he must have written it.

Chapter 6 That evening Valjean goes out and Cosette makes herself up more prettily than usual, though she's not expecting a guest. She goes out to sit on the bench, and suddenly sees Marius. He is thinner and paler, with shadowy eyes but a face **illuminated** by the sunset. Cosette backs away, but he asks for her to forgive him: he had to come. He says that he followed her to her previous home nearly a year ago. Now, often he stands beneath the house and can hear her singing through the shutters. He adores her, he says.

Cosette may not admit to herself that she's expecting someone, but the narrator suggests that she shares a kind of mystical connection to Marius, such that they can almost sense each other's presence. Light here allows Cosette to recognize and study Marius's face, and also underlines the moral upstandingness of their meeting.

Cosette is about to faint, but Marius catches her, feeling love, not lust, for her. Marius asks if she loves him, and she says he knows she does. They kiss, and then look at each other. Slowly, they begin to tell each other everything about their pasts, their childhoods and illusions. At the end, they ask each other's names.

The narrator has poked fun at Marius's long-suffering obsession with Cosette even when he didn't know her name, but here the point is that names are mere social appendages, irrelevant to true love.

VOLUME 4, BOOK 6: LITTLE GAVROCHE

Chapter 1 Since 1823, the Thenardiers had had two other boys, but had gotten rid of them both when they were small. Madame Thenardier only ever loved her daughters. This is how she got rid of the sons: a woman Magnon, the mistress of the old Gillenormand who lived on the Quai des Celestins, had lost both her (and Gillenormand's) sons in a croup epidemic, so her monthly salary from Gillenormand was gone. Thenardier's two boys were the same age, so they were swapped, for a payment to Madame Thenardier at 10 francs a month. As she handed them over, Madame Thenardier felt a momentary scruple, but was consoled by her husband.

Once again, Paris proves a shockingly small city, as more sets of characters' lives intertwine—here, the Gillenormands (and by extension, Marius) with the Thenardiers and their two sons. The narrator has noted before that Madame Thenardier is not as brutal or malicious as her husband, and yet her very loyalty to her husband—in other circumstances a laudable trait—erodes her moral sense even more.

One day, the police made a raid in Magnon's neighborhood, and she was seized for theft while the boys were playing in the backyard. They found the house locked, and began to wander the streets.

Hugo often stresses the particular misery suffered by the most innocent members of society, in this case urban children.

Chapter 2 One windy evening in 1832, Little Gavroche, wearing a woman's shawl he picked up somewhere, is surveying a shop-front to determine whether he could steal away a bar of soap to sell in the suburbs, which could pay for his breakfast. Meanwhile, two small children enter the house sobbing, probably begging for alms. As the man shoos them out, Gavroche follows them and asks what's wrong. They have nowhere to sleep, they say. Gavroche realizes they must be "greenies" or new to the streets; he tells them to come along with him.

Having filled in some of the background on the two children picked up by Gavroche, the narrator can now return to the present-day action. The reader now has an extra level of sympathy for these children, knowing that they are, in fact, all brothers (since Gavroche had also been abandoned by his parents, the Thenardiers). Gavroche's selfless kindness thus becomes more poignant.

They wander up the street. At one point Gavroche sees a beggar-girl around 13 years old wearing a too-short petticoat, and he flings his shawl onto the girl's shoulders. He shivers but with good humor, saying that if the wind keeps up he'll cancel his weather subscription. The two children say they haven't eaten all day; they don't know where their parents are. Gavroche triumphantly draws a sou from the pocket, races into the baker's shop, and cries out for bread. The baker gives them a black piece, and Gavroche coldly demands white bread. The baker can't repress a smile. Gavroche keeps the smallest piece for himself.

Gavroche, as we've learned from the chapters on the "physiognomy" of the Paris gamin, is both merry and kindhearted, a troublemaker but a good person at heart. We can see both these qualities at work as he wanders the streets of Paris with the two children. Gavroche seems entirely comfortable in the city, navigating its streets and shops as well as anyone.

As they head up towards the Bastille, Gavroche calls out to a disguised Montparnasse, who says he's going to find Babet, who's escaped. Montparnasse tells Gavroche that the other day he met a bourgeois who made him a present of a sermon and his purse, but a minute later there was nothing left in his pocket—except the sermon, says Gavroche. Montparnasse asks Gavroche where they're going, and he says to his lodgings, "in the elephant." Montparnasse laughs at him, but is also troubled by how easily Gavroche recognized him in disguise. Then he says some seemingly senseless words to Gavroche, who understands, looks around, and sees a police sergeant. Gavroche says they must be off, but if Montparnasse needs him that night he can call him.

Through living on the streets, Gavroche is acquainted with Paris's lower-level crime gangs, but we've also already seen him knock Valjean's money bag out of Montparnasse's hands and throw it to Mabeuf, thus finding—in a playful way—a measure of justice as he understands it. In one sense, the narrator suggests that Paris's secrets are the property of one common underclass, but in another way, he proposes that we can set up a moral hierarchy of this underclass rather than judging them all indiscriminately.

Montparnasse had used a street warning that involves the syllable "dig" repeated four or five times in a sentence to mean "we can no longer talk freely," thus the senseless phrase that warned Gavroche of the sergeant's presence. Gavroche and the children head off towards a monument near the basin of the Bastille canal. The monument was an idea of Napoleon's that most Parisian residents have entirely forgotten. It is a 40-foot-high timber elephant, carrying a tower on its back that resembles a house, now black with time and falling into ruins. A tribunal once was called upon to judge a child caught sleeping there, under the charge of vagabondage and mutilation of a public monument. Gavroche leads the young boys under a fence and up a ladder to the opening, telling them not to be afraid.

One of the ways this Parisian underclass operates is through its own language, allowing its members to better navigate their environment without being constantly bothered by the police. Recall that Victor Hugo is writing Les Misérables in exile, and so he depicts Paris's eccentricities fondly, almost lovingly, even such remnants of history as an abandoned elephant statue. Again, of course, history is always present in Paris, which bears the traces of the revolutionary and Napoleonic past.

The narrator notes that while the bourgeois might look upon the elephant disapprovingly as they pass, asking what it's good for, in fact the monument has served to protect small beings who have no parents, bread, or refuge from cold and rain: a loftier purpose than the one envisaged by Napoleon. Gavroche pushes the boys towards his bed, a straw mat with woolen stuffing for a blanket, surrounded by brass wire for a curtain. The boys look at him admiringly and ask if he's not afraid of the police—Gavroche says they must call them "bobbies" instead, and teaches them a few more essential slang words. He says they'll have fun, swimming in the Seine in summer, sneaking into the theater and opera, and watching the guillotine.

Just as the narrator had disapprovingly depicted the stereotype of the clergyman who spends lavishly—a stereotype to which the Bishop of D--- didn't conform—here he positions himself somewhat against the trappings of imperial grandeur. Instead he suggests that a monument's "use value" can be understood as the extent to which it can provide something of value to the poor. Gavroche makes this new world of homelessness seem far more inviting through his vast knowledge of Paris and its attractions.

As they lie down to sleep, the boys hear a strange scratching. Gavroche says it's the rats—he had a cat, but they ate her. The boys begin to tremble, but Gavroche grasps their hands until they fall asleep again. Then Gavroche hears a cry, "Kirikikiou!" and descends to find Montparnasse, who tells Gavroche they need him. They criss-cross the market-gardeners' carts to reach the Rue Saint-Antoine.

Though Gavroche can't be more than a few years older than the two other boys, he takes on the role of their guardian and protector, at least until other requirements steal him away—though again, Gavroche's relationship to Montparnasse is ambivalent at best.

That night, Thenardier, Brujon, and Gueulemer had planned an escape from prison. Brujon had come across a nail, which was the key to escape from the New Building—a crumbling part of the prison and its weak point. He was placed in the same dormitory as Gueulemer, their beds against the chimney. Thenardier was directly above them in the section known as "Bel-Air," over which was an enormous black wall and an even blacker roof. Brujon, who learned that Babet had escaped that morning, began to pierce the chimney with the nail he'd found. The rain and wind covered the noise. Forty-five minutes later, they had pierced the wall, scaled the chimney and climbed down on a rope, joining Babet and Montparnasse.

Even inside the prison, the members of Paris's underworld, the Patron-Minette gang, have managed to cluster together and cook up ideas for their escapes. We're certainly meant to disapprove of the immoral, criminal ways of these men, but Hugo is also an expert storyteller, and sometimes it's in the descriptions of the least ethically appealing characters that the scenes really adopt a fast-paced tempo and gain suspense.

Towards one a.m., Thenardier had seen two shadows pass in front of his dormer-window. Thenardier, as a burglar, was considered in need of greater watch, but he was also allowed to keep a metal spike to poke his bread into a hole in the wall to "keep it from the rats." Later, a newly recruited soldier would be found asleep next to the cell. There was a hole in the ceiling and another in the roof, along with the "stupefying wine" bottle with which he'd drugged the soldier. Still, no one knows how Thenardier was able to jump from roof to roof to finally reach the Rue de Roi-de-Sicile.

We've seen earlier how infuriated Thenardier has become when being outsmarted by Jean Valjean. However, Valjean is a special case, and compared to many others in Paris, Thenardier is shrewd enough to get what he wants out of people and to achieve his criminal designs—shrewd enough even that the narrator himself claims not to know how he completed one leg of his escape.

Finally, though, Thenardier had reached one final roof, three stories from the ground, but the rope he had was too short. Lying in despair, asking himself if his accomplices had succeeded and would come to help him, he heard four o'clock strike. There was a sudden uproar in the prison with the discovery of the escape. Then Thenardier had seen four men stopping directly under him—his accomplices—arguing about whether to wait for him or not. Montparnasse grumbled that one doesn't desert friends in a scrape, but Brujon said he must have been caught.

Again, the fast pacing and dramatic development of this scene has the secondary effect of making the reader root for Thenardier's escape—perhaps a reaction that Hugo himself wants to provoke, since it underlines the ambivalence with which we are supposed to view judgment and the judged, criminality and innocence, justice and injustice.

Thenardier dared not call, instead tossing the rope. Montparnasse saw him, but Thenardier said he was paralyzed with cold and couldn't move. Montparnasse slipped away: it was at this point that he fetched Gavroche. Now, he orders Gavroche to climb up and save the man, whom Gavroche recognizes as his father. He scurries up, ties Thenardier to a rope, and the team lowers him to the ground. At once, they discuss the next crime they'll commit.

The various threads of the narrative join together once again, as Gavroche and Thenardier—both, in different ways, men of the Parisian streets—are made to meet again. Gavroche might lend a hand in Montparnasse's intrigues, but he's not one to invite them or help plan them himself.

VOLUME 4, BOOK 7: SLANG

Chapter 1 The narrator begins by tracing the forms of "pigritia" or "sloth," including "la pègre," for theft, and "la pègrenne," for hunger: thus they're two sides of the same coin. Many object to this kind of slang, the language of prisons and convicts. The narrator thinks this is an even better reason to study and try to understand it. All professions have their own jargon. This includes ways of talking from the speech of printers to philosophers to duchesses, and even the puns of Shakespeare. But the kind of slang to which the narrator will limit himself is the one linked closely to wretchedness, a linguistic attack on social order.

The narrator suggests that hunger begets sloth and theft, so that those who are labeled "thieves" are often not as guilty as they appear. The narrator also positions this viewpoint as a moderate rather than radical one: slang such as this might not be beautiful, but it's important to study it both because its practitioners are also members of humanity, and because it allows us to learn more about this particular social subset.

The historian must in any case study these social infirmities, just as he studies the people who toil and suffer, the interior pain and suffering of so many. A historian of people's public life must be a historian of their deep inner life. The history of manners and ideas is another side of the history of events and facts.

We've already seen the connections made by Hugo between social and political history and individual narrative, but here he specifies that it's specifically individual misery that has something to say about larger social issues.

Chapter 2 Every syllable of slang, the narrator argues, is darkened, but it's still a language with its own poetry—a material deposit on which many languages and dialects have left a trace, as well as words simply made up by man. Slang is full of metaphor, like saying "to wriggle" for to eat, or "a rat" for a bread thief. As the dialect of corruption, slang can easily be corrupted itself and change its form and use.

By linking slang to poetry, the narrator proposes that it can be considered creative and even beautiful, as well as an opportunity to plumb meaning and complexity, since one word can have so many historical influences and contemporary examples of usage.

The songs of the galleys come from a cellar that once existed below the Chatelet, a vault with a stone ceiling and mud floor where men condemned to the galleys were kept before being transferred to Toulon. Chained to a beam running the length of the vault, men were sometimes kept months in the place, forced to remain motionless without lying down (or else they'd be strangled by their collar). Here slang songs had their birth. Slang thus recalls the desperate thoughts of the world's most wretched inhabitants.

Here we learn about a particularly wretched example of Paris's mysteries and secrets. The narrator is not exactly suggesting that we should celebrate slang, but by explaining that it arose out of the experience of the condemned, he shows how we can better understand social misery by studying the language of its victims.

Chapter 3 Though convicts' songs of slang are often melancholy, over the course of the 18th century some also became jovial and insolent. This is a sign that convicts have lost a sense of their criminality. The narrator does not accuse the great Enlightenment philosophers like Diderot and Rousseau for this change, but rather those who stirred people up with appealing but illogical ideas and uncontrolled rage.

This chapter shows Hugo's ambivalence—he doesn't want to embrace people like Montparnasse, so he suggests that what distinguishes them is their shift from resorting to crime in desperation to participating in crime (and criminal songs) simply for the fun of it.

It was the French Revolution that cut short this dangerous line of thought, as it was like the idea itself armed with a sword, expelling unclean thought, stopping torture, and spreading the truth by equipping men with a sense of natural right. Now we no longer have feudal blood in our veins, and instead attempt to follow the law of liberty and progress. Still, the narrator somewhat regrets the "Jacquerie," or wild anger, which is no longer able to scare those in power.

Hugo suggests that there was a place for anger and desperation, since it was visible and frightening to those in power at the time, but he also continues to profess a belief in slow, gradual progress as the best way to lead society out of its own crimes—crimes like condemning prisoners to inhuman treatment.

Chapter 4 Though society no longer has to fear sudden mass madness, misery hasn't been eradicated: that can be just as dangerous. Progress means not just material improvement but also intellectual and moral growth. Those who refuse progress are merely condemning themselves. Instead, people must work for social harmony to prevent the kind of collapse that befell great civilizations of the past, such as Babylon, Rome, and Egypt. It is difficult to constantly seek the ideal when surrounded by menaces, but it must be done.

Here, we have a different idea of what makes society work or crumble—not uprisings by the masses, but rather the ability for people within society to emerge from misery and play their own part in progress. The narrator suggests that poverty and misery can have world-historical consequences, by tying this portrait to a notion of civilizational collapse.

VOLUME 4, BOOK 8: ENCHANTMENTS AND DESOLATIONS

Chapter 1 It was Eponine who had originally pointed the Rue Plumet home out to Marius, enabling him to finally enter Cosette's garden. Now, he enters every evening that May of 1832. They only hold each other's hands and profess the kind of inanities common to people in love. Marius attempts to compliment Cosette, and they often laugh easily and familiarly. In general, they idolize each other.

Once again, the narrator describes the scenes of love between Marius and Cosette benignly, but also with a touch of skepticism, suggesting that while love can be touching and good, there's also a chance for it to slip into pure idolatry, which would mean ignoring others in need.

Chapter 2 Marius had told Cosette that he was an orphan and lawyer, and that he was on bad terms with his wealthy grandfather, but Cosette cares little about these worldly attributes. Marius feels the same: it doesn't even occur to him to tell her about the night at the Thenardiers' and her father's strange flight. The lovers tell each other everything but what's related to reality, and they never ask what their love will lead to.

"Reality" for Marius and Cosette has little to do with the complexities and difficulties dealt with by Valjean, for example, but this inattention is also what allows their love to continue. They are unhampered by the revelations and confusion that would occur if Cosette learned more about her father's activities.

Chapter 3 With Cosette happy again, Valjean suspects nothing and is content himself. The couple hides in the garden for hours, and Marius usually doesn't go away until after midnight. Courfeyrac notices his friend's change of habits and jovially asks what "her" name is, but Marius stays silent.

While Courfeyrac considers this new love affair as one of many among his friends, for Marius it is sacred enough that he refuses to tell his friend anything about Cosette or his feelings.

One day Marius is on his way to the garden when a girl greets him: it is Eponine, whom he hasn't thought of since the day she led him to Cosette's. The narrator notes that love can bar someone from enacting evil, but it can also make him too thoughtless to be good. Marius greets Eponine with the formal "you." She exclaims, "Say—" but then pauses, trying to smile, abruptly says good evening again, and hurries away.

Here, the narrator explicitly states one of the drawbacks of the sentiment of love, which, in the novel, is often a somewhat ambivalent phenomenon. As readers, we are far more aware of Eponine's own struggles and unhappiness than Marius is.

Chapter 4 The next day is June 3rd, 1832. That night, Marius once again catches sight of Eponine on the way to the Rue Plumet, so he ducks out of sight. Eponine follows him, unsuspecting, and watches him slip into the garden. Towards ten o'clock six men enter the Rue Plumet together and begin to talk softly, asking if this is the place, and if there's a "dog" in the garden—if so, another one says, he has a "ball" that they'll make him eat. One of the men comes up to the garden entrance, but suddenly Eponine shows herself to the man—it's her father, Thenardier.

After having escaped from prison, the men of the Patron-Minette find themselves once again ready to enact whatever kind of crime they can. Speaking in slang, they cannot be understood by many, but in another of the novel's coincidences, Eponine happens to find herself at the very place where they're plotting, and she is well-suited (having grown up a Thenardier) to understand the criminal dialect.

Thenardier asks what Eponine is doing there, and says she shouldn't hinder them, but she asks sweetly how he managed the escape, and how her mother is doing. She hugs him, and then turns to the five others, including Brujon and Montparnasse. She says she's made inquiries, and there's nothing in this house—it's poor folks who have little money. Eponine entreats Montparnasse not to enter, and finally says firmly that she won't allow it. She'll scream, beat the door, and have all six seized. She's not afraid, even of her father. She's used to being hungry and cold and couldn't be bothered if she died the next day.

The narrator is quick to differentiate Eponine from her father and the other members of the Patron-Minette gang. Acting out of love for Marius (even though he's in the garden with his own lover, Eponine's rival), she is willing to lie or scream in order to protect him from the criminals. The narrator her shows just how desperate Eponine, abandoned by her family and society, has become.

Montparnasse flashes his knife and tells the others to go in and do the job: he'll stay and take care of Eponine. Thenardier says nothing. But Brujon, who has the reputation of never turning back, seems thoughtful and suggests that they go away. Eponine watches them retreat into the dark and gloom.

Thenardier is pretty roundly condemned in terms of morality here—he says nothing to protect his own daughter, even as Montparnasse suggests he'll "take care of her" with his knife.


Chapter 5 Then the Rue Plumet becomes calm and sleepy again. The previous scene recalls the forest, where wild nature feeds off gloom, bestiality, and hunger in search of prey.

The narrator makes a surprising analogy here, as he compares Paris to the opposite of the urban, thus stressing its more wild and bestial aspects.

Chapter 6 Meanwhile, Marius had found Cosette weeping in the garden. Her father has business that may require them to go to England. For six weeks Marius has been living outside life, now he's forced to return to it. He coldly asks if Cosette will join him, speaking with the formal "you," and she asks what he expects her to do—she'll go with her father. Then he'll go elsewhere, Marius says. Cosette says he can go away with them, but he replies that she's mad—he's in debt, has few clothes, and can't afford a passport. Marius throws himself against a tree, then turns around to see Cosette sobbing. They swear they love each other; Marius says he'll die if she leaves. He says not to expect him tomorrow: he has a plan. He gives her his address in case something happens, engraving "16 Rue de la Verrerie" on the wall.

We've seen how Marius' and Cosette's love for each other has prevented them from fully engaging in reality, but now, they're required to confront themselves with very practical matters rather than remaining in their idyll of the last few weeks. Initially, the narrator shows how love actually makes Marius act more harshly, speaking out of the pain that's closely connected with love. However, he's able to overcome this sorrier side of love, and it's suggested that he may be able to find a way to turn reality to his advantage through his plan.

Chapter 7 Gillenormand is over 91 years old and still lives with his daughter. He's been waiting for Marius for four years, confident that the young man would ring the bell at some point, though feeling incapable of taking the first step towards reconciliation. He has a portrait of his other daughter in his room, and one day tells Mademoiselle Gillenormand that the portrait has a likeness to Marius. But when she asks if he's still angry with Marius, Gillenormand cries that he's an ingrate, a wicked scoundrel.

Gillenormand is portrayed, as he has been before, as stubborn, proud, and petty, but ultimately capable of great love. However, it is because he cannot bring himself to forgive Marius that, according to the logic of the novel, he is forced to suffer greatly and deny himself the very possibilities of love that should theoretically be open to him.


Still, Mademoiselle Gillenormand's attempt to insert Theodule as the new heir hasn't worked. Theodule is vulgar and gloats too much about his mistresses; finally Gillenormand tells his daughter not to invite him anymore. One June evening, Gillenormand is thinking lovingly but bitterly of Marius, when the butler asks if M. Marius may come in. He stammers yes, and Marius enters. Gillenormand is overwhelmed with happiness. He thinks that Marius seems noble and distinguished despite being clothed in rags.

Though Gillenormand claims he harbors no kind feelings towards Marius, the fact that he refuses to replace Marius with Theodule as his heir underlines how much he prefers the former. Marius has come to occupy almost a dream-like position for Gillenormand, who's idolized him—and hidden his own idolatry from himself—for years.


Gillenormand's joy is not clear in his harsh words asking why Marius has come—and Marius says it's not to beg his pardon. With grief and anger, his grandfather asks what he wants. Marius asks him to have pity on him. These words are too late, however. Gillenormand rises up, saying that Marius has all the advantages of youth whereas he himself is wasting away, and he has no right to ask for "pity." As he's speaking, he realizes that his harshness will probably drive Marius away. This increases his despair, which only makes him more furious—he cries that Marius has become a dandy and debtor. Finally, Marius says he wants to ask for permission to marry.

This scene is depicted as a tragic example of miscommunication, in which most of what Gillenormand is thinking either doesn't get translated into words or becomes distorted in his attempt to articulate what he means. Gillenormand continues to be torn between his love for his grandson and the accumulated manners and morals of his generation, political creed, and sense of French history.

Gillenormand rings for his daughter, who looks at Marius, frightened. Sarcastically, Gillenormand remarks that Marius has come merely for a formality. He asks if Marius earns anything by his trade of lawyer, and Marius says he does not. Gillenormand exclaims that he's 21, has no profession, and lives on only 1,200 livres a year (which, in fact, Marius has never accepted). Marius begs his grandfather to permit him to marry, crying out, "Father!" but he cries, "Never!" Marius loses all hope, and slowly exits the chamber. At the moment when he opens the door, Gillenormand seizes him by the collar and drags him back into the room, ordering him to tell him all about his situation. It was the word "Father" that enacted this change, and suddenly Gillenormand takes on a paternal, though brusque, kindness.

Even after turning Marius out of the house, Gillenormand had, as we've seen, taken solace in the fact that Marius was doing all the necessary steps to prepare to become a successful lawyer. Now, he finds that Marius's politics appear to be more radical than he feared—and Gillenormand is not even aware that Marius had told his aunt, without his grandfather's knowledge, that he wouldn't accept a monthly stipend from his grandfather. Gillenormand's change of mood is somewhat disturbing in its suddenness, but it also underlines his hidden hopes for how Marius thinks of him.

Marius begins to tell Gillenormand about Cosette. Gillenormand responds that it's right to be in love at his age: Marius must simply come talk to him, and he'll iron everything out. The old man then starts laughing and tells Marius to make the woman his mistress. Marius turns pale, picks up his hat, and says that Gillenormand has insulted his wife: he can ask nothing more of him. Gillenormand remains stunned and motionless, and then races out the door, but Marius is nowhere to be seen. Gillenormand raises his hands to his head with an anguished expression, and then falls back into an armchair in a faint.

This scene takes on tragicomic proportions, as Gillenormand's hopes for a repaired relationship with Marius are thwarted yet again. This time Gillenormand knows he's directly at fault for assuming that Marius shares his cavalier attitudes (and those of, in general, a certain subset of Parisian aristocrats in Gillenormand's generation) about the treatment of women and men's proper relation to them.

VOLUME 4, BOOK 9: WHITHER ARE THEY GOING?

Chapter 1 That same day, Valjean sits alone in the Champ-de-Mars, thinking about how often he's seen Thenardier prowling the neighborhood recently. This, combined with recent political troubles in Paris, has made him decide to go to England. That morning, he had seen on the garden wall the engraved "16 Rue de la Verrerie." He didn't speak to Cosette of this, not wanting to alarm her. Valjean sits on the bench outside and a piece of paper falls onto his knees, as if someone had dropped it from over his head. It says "MOVE AWAY FROM YOUR HOUSE." Valjean catches sight of a small figure slipping away.

This combination of events recalls other moments when Valjean slowly became suspicious, but realized something was wrong almost too late—at the Thenardier hovel, or when Javert had nearly discovered him in the streets. Here, though, in an example of dramatic irony, the reader is aware that at least one of Valjean's worries—the engraved address—has to do with something else entirely.

Chapter 2 Marius begins to wander the street, suffering. At two in the morning he returns to his room, where Courfeyrac and his friends are waiting to go out to "General Lamarque's funeral." Marius barely pays attention to them, but pockets the pistols given to him by Javert, with no thought of what he's do with them. He wanders around all day, only able to think about seeing Cosette at nine. But when he rushes into the garden, she isn't there. He calls up to her window, but no one is in the house. He sits on the steps in despair. Suddenly Eponine's voice calls out, saying that his friends are waiting for him at the barricade of the Rue de la Chanvrerie.

June 1832 marked the death of General Lamarque, a prominent critic of Louis-Philippe's social and human-rights policies who had become an enormously popular political figure for this reason. Though Marius has been invested in politics and history before, he now pays little attention to this background (as he pays little attention to Eponine), instead singlemindedly fixated on how to ensure that he and Cosette won't be separated.

Chapter 3 M. Mabeuf has continued his downward spiral, despite Valjean's purse fallen from the sky, which he deposited at the police office. He has had to sell all his life's work, he dines on bread and potatoes, and he's sold all his furniture, though he keeps his most precious rare books. Still, he remains serene. One day, Mother Plutarque says she has no money to buy anything. Mabeuf opens his bookshelf, gazes at the items like a father at his children, seizes one, and returns with 30 sous. He has to do this several times, growing more somber on each occasion.

Mabeuf is one of the more endearing characters out of the vast collection portrayed in Les Misérables. *The narrator sympathetically describes the eccentricities of this Parisian specimen who is reluctant to sell his precious rare books even to eat. The fact that he's required to do so thus takes on tragic proportions, as Hugo explores another set of victims of misery: the old and infirm.*

Mabeuf's destitution becomes known by the president of the Horticultural Society Mabeuf belongs to, and the president speaks to the Minister of Agriculture and Commerce. The minister invites Mabeuf to dine with him, but at his home Mabeuf's rags astonish the ushers, and no one speaks to him. The minister's wife finally asks who that old gentleman is. Mabeuf returns home on foot in a rainstorm. His only enjoyment is to read his Greek Diogenes Laertius (a biographer of philosophers). Finally he sells this last book to pay for Mother Plutarque's doctor's bill.

Once again, the narrator contrasts his own compassionate portrayal of a destitute figure with the thoughtlessness and lack of compassion shown by most of society. The narrator shows how people who are well-off may be well-intentioned, but this thoughtlessness can be just as pernicious as active malice. The opposite of this attitude would be Mabeuf's earnest concern in selling his beloved book for Mother Plutarque.

The following day Mabeuf sits in his garden with a drooping head. That afternoon he hears shots and clamors, and the gardener says it's the riots—people are fighting. With a distracted air, Mabeuf goes off in the direction of the noise.

Mabeuf has been forced to deprive himself of everything he loves. This, the narrator suggests, is how one may be swept up into history and revolution.

VOLUME 4, BOOK 10: THE 5TH OF JUNE, 1832

Chapter 1 The narrator describes revolt as a small bit of electricity that quivers and grows at random, rising from bitterness, enthusiasms, repressed instincts, youthful courage, empty dreams, and a whole host of other causes. Some theories say that a small amount of revolt strengthens governments that are not overthrown. The Revolution of 1830 had let out social grievances without resolving them, but the revolts that followed were not worth the bloodshed. The narrator instead claims that one popular movement must be distinguished from another. Each uprising must be considered on its own merits and causes.

Once again, the narrator begins a new section of the novel with a rumination on broader social, political, or historical affairs, all of which will turn out to be somehow relevant to the plot. Hugo held a complex attitude towards revolution, and throughout this section it's difficult to identify a clear-cut opinion on it, and the extent to which it's justified (a complexity that perhaps is best suited to this novel in particular).


Chapter 2 For the narrator, an uprising or revolt is a perversion of democracy, whereas an insurrection is in the right, being the war of the whole against the faction (rather than of a faction against the whole). The same cannon pointed against the people can be right at one historical moment and wrong at another, and this has been true throughout history. The narrator lists a number of events in French and Roman history that can be characterized as uprisings.

This is a complicated, nuanced view of history—it's impossible to think up laws or rules that would apply to all nations and all uprisings throughout history. This belief can be related to the understanding of historical narrative as deeply tied to individual experiences and lives within it.

Riot is defined as coming from a material situation, whereas insurrection is always a moral affair. Nevertheless, an insurrection always begins as a riot. Sometimes this riot gets lost in some moral swamp rather than continuing on the path of justice and reason towards justified insurrection and revolution. Universal suffrage, by giving the vote to insurrection, takes the power of arms away from it, so that in the future, wars must inevitably grow increasingly rare.

Hugo goes on to complicate the definitions that he's laid out already, by showing how one affair—a riot—can bleed into another. Again, he is careful to stress how difficult it is to tell whether these movements are morally justifiable or not, since they may or may not swerve off the path of justice.

But for the bourgeois, the narrator notes, these subtle differences are lost: they see everything as treacherous rebellion. The narrator asks what the movement of June 1832 was—a revolt or insurrection. It began rapidly and with grandeur, but was extinguished in melancholy. It can only be referred to with respect. The narrator claims he must insist on describing petty details and personal stories, which are often lost in history. Apart from a few names being altered, the story he will tell is true and genuine.

Hugo is clear to distinguish himself from one camp—indeed, for him, the bourgeois understanding of rebellion is to be dismissed precisely because it holds an overly simplistic view on how to think about social uprisings. We are promised once again a view of history that values individual voices rather than simply the decisions of great leaders.

Chapter 3 The spark for the June events was the death of the beloved General Lamarque in June. On the day of his burial, June 5th, the Faubourg Saint-Antoine was filled with rumors, and people began to arm themselves. Workmen assembled at the Rue de Bercy, whispering together with revolutionary agents. That day the funeral procession, with the National Guard beside its wound through the streets of Paris. Behind the official figures came a massive crowd of students, refugees, children, carpenters on strike, and other workers. The government watched them uneasily, as the enthusiastic majority of the people mingled with some true criminals who wanted to take advantage of the opportunity to steal and plunder.

The Faubourg Saint-Antoine is a particular neighborhood of Paris that will come to stand, in the novel, for revolutionary sentiment and activity—a corner of Paris that can be identified and described politically. The narrator shows how disparate and, to an extent, motley this politically motivated group is, though in a way that suggests they are united by being particularly vulnerable and fragile members of society. We're also reminded that amid this crowd are some whose intentions are less noble.

The hearse passed the Bastille and stopped at the bridge of Austerlitz. There an official, Lafayette, gave a farewell to Lamarque. Then a man on horseback with a red flag rode into the middle of the group. Someone shouted, "Lamarque to the Pantheon!—Lafayette to the Town-hall!" and young men began to drag the hearse across the bridge. The cavalry was deployed to the bridge. Suddenly, three shots were fired: one hit the chief of the squadron, another killed an old woman at a window, and the third glanced off an officer's shoulder. Something snapped, and a fight began. A barricade was thrown up and the crowd dispersed, the men shouting, "To arms!" as they fled.

It's difficult to tell exactly what's going on in these passages, or what triggered the descent into chaos—in fact, this lack of clarity is probably an intentional rhetorical tool, since it mimics the confusion of the moment for the characters, as tensions rise between the official political mourners (led by Lafayette) and the city residents who believe that, in his defense of the poor and vulnerable, Lamarque truly belongs to them.

Chapter 4 The narrator muses on the difficulty of tracing how a riot spreads and grows. Within 15 minutes, in streets throughout Paris, one group pillaged a small-arms factory, some men looted a store, others pursued National Guard officers, and students distributed arms—all taking place simultaneously, with 27 barricades springing up in one neighborhood alone. One young man carried passwords from one barricade to another and the wine-shops were converted to guard-houses. One man later killed was found to have on his person a map of Paris showing its most intricate and narrow streets.

Just as the narrator has traced the paths and detailed the movements and monuments of Paris in other sections, here he underlines the pulsing, living element of the city. A riot seems to spread almost like a virus, exponentially but without anyone being able to witness exactly how. The map on the body of the man later killed highlights how closely tied riots and revolution can be to the very nature of Paris, at least according to the novel.

On June 5th the center of Paris becomes a massive but winding fortress, with battlegrounds at countless street corners. The soldiers are disconcerted by this confusing battlefield, while the students and other citizens move through the streets easily.

In this account, Paris seems to belong most of all to people like students and others who are generally dismissed as irrelevant.

Chapter 5 As usual, the parts of Paris beyond the rebellious neighborhoods remain calm, the inhabitants remarking casually that fights are going on in that general direction. The theaters keep on their shows, and passers-by continue to dinner. A year earlier, a fusillade in one neighborhood had been stopped to allow a wedding party to pass, without anyone batting an eye. This time, however, the city seems more afraid. Rumors travel quickly about hundreds of warriors hidden in a cathedral, or about Lafayette wounded or ill, or about a possible evacuation of Paris. By 9:00, over 800 people are arrested. Many remain at home and wait for the first cannon shot.

In some ways, given that Paris is an ideal city for revolt—its streets and alleyways are conducive to barricades, and those most likely to revolt are also those best acquainted with the city's secrets—these kinds of uprisings don't take on much historical importance. Interestingly, June 1832 might be considered one of those less important riots, and the narrator does not yet explain why the novel presents an alternative perspective.

VOLUME 4, BOOK 11: THE ATOM FRATERNIZES WITH THE HURRICANE

Chapter 1 At the moment when the insurrection spreads out from the funeral hearse, a small child in rags is coming down the Rue Menilmotant with a bunch of flowers in his hands. He glimpses a pistol in the window of a merchant's shop, and grabs it. Little Gavroche then races through the Rue Amelot on his way to the battle, singing a popular tune. Once he had paid his father the favor of helping him escape, he had returned to his elephant, shared breakfast with the two little boys, and had told them to return that evening. They never did, and ten weeks later Gavroche is still wondering where they are. He runs through the Rue Saint-Louis and the Rue du Parc-Royal, shaking his head at the comfortable-looking businessmen he passes on the street.

At first, we see Gavroche as just another small Parisian "gamin" or street urchin, with his typical mix of the rascally and the innocent. For the rest of the novel, however, Gavroche will come to be associated with popular tunes—which he sings constantly—suggesting both his own "popular," lower-class background, and his general merriness even in the face of danger. Gavroche is, however, at least somewhat politically aware, able to grasp the inherent unfairness of large gaps of inequality between the rich and poor.

Chapter 2 Gavroche calls out, "Let's fight!" At that moment, the horse of a National Guardsman falls, and Gavroche helps the man raise his horse again, before racing along his way through the Marais, which seems sleepy and calm. A rag-picker with her basket on her back is speaking with three female porters about the high cost of meat and then about the King of Rome and Louis XVIII. Gavroche stops and asks what they're talking about, and the women shush him disapprovingly. They catch sight of his pistol and remark that the streets seem full of ruffians with guns. Gavroche tells them that the pistol is in their interests—it's so they'll have better things to eat.

Gavroche may have a happy-go-lucky viewpoint on the battles to come, rather than taking them as seriously as others, but he also is ready to assist others almost reflexively, even when the one in need happens to be a National Guardsman, or the "enemy." Again, Gavroche may have a somewhat simplistic view of what the rebels are fighting for, but it's also suggested that because of his experience with Paris's underworld, he understands better than most.

Chapter 3 A hairdresser—the same one who had shooed away the two little boys whom Gavroche had taken in—is shaving an old soldier who had served under the Empire. They begin talking about Lamarque and then about Napoleonic battle stories. Suddenly, a resounding crash can be heard and the show-window is fractured. The hairdresser cries that it's a cannon-ball, but the soldier picks up a pebble, and the hairdresser sees Gavroche running away down the street. He's taken revenge for the two boys.

Gavroche pauses in the midst of his preparations for battle to take what he sees as a kind of justice for the two boys. He'd barely spent a day with them, but feels loyal enough to enact revenge for their sake. This loyalty that takes on a more poignant quality given that the reader knows that the two boys are actually Gavroche's brothers.

Chapter 4 Gavroche meets up with Enjolras, Courfeyrac, and their friends, who march to the Quai Morland. They're joined by students, artists, artisans, and others armed with clubs and bayonets, along with one old man: M. Mabeuf.

It's unclear how Gavroche knows the members of the Friends of the ABC, except that they all (with Mabeuf) seem to occupy the same Parisian social and political stratum.

Chapter 5 Earlier, the group had met the old man walking in a zig-zag, as though drunk. Courfeyrac had recognized Mabeuf, who had often accompanied Marius to his door, and he had told him to go home, as there was fighting to be had. Mabeuf had said that that was all good, and followed them. Now Gavroche marches ahead, singing another of his popular tunes.

Again, figures like Mabeuf or Gavroche seem to have been swept up in the fighting for reasons more circumstantial than political, though their own individual stories reflect the need for the kind of change that the rioters are promoting.

Chapter 6 As they go along, the crowd grows. They pass Courfeyrac's door, so he runs up to get his purse and hat. On the way down, the porter says someone wants to speak with him. A pale, thin, freckled man steps out and asks for Marius. Courfeyrac doesn't know where he is; he says he's off to the barricades. The pale young man offers to go along. Despite intending to reach Saint-Merry, the crowd deviates (as mobs tend to do) to the Rue Saint-Denis.

It's a mystery both to Courfeyrac and to us as readers who the freckled young man might be. Again, this is a case in which figures are swept up into the battles and barricades merely because they happen to find themselves in the Parisian neighborhoods that are currently teeming with revolutionary sentiment.

VOLUME 4, BOOK 12: CORINTHE

Chapter 1 Today, when Parisians enter the basket-maker's shop on the Rue Rambuteau, they don't know what horrors happened here. This was once the Rue de la Chanvrerie, the site of a famous barricade. The narrator suggests imagining an "N" touching the Rue Saint-Denis on the summit and the Halles on its base, with the three bars forming three different streets, and the Rue Mondetour cutting these three strokes at crooked angles—all of which created seven unevenly cut up islands of houses.

Earlier, the narrator had exclaimed how different the Paris at the time of the novel's writing is from the Paris at the time in which the novel takes place. These streets can all be mapped onto today's Paris, such that the novel takes on a stunningly exact historical reality, into which novelistic narrative enters .

At the bottom of one of these cul-de-sacs is a 300-year-old tavern called Corinthe. It was passed down from family to family and now belongs to the Hucheloups who live on the second floor. Corinthe is the meeting-place of Courfeyrac and his friends. Father Hucheloup was an amiable man who enjoyed hosting them, but died in 1830, and his devastated widow continues to keep the shop. The wine and food has deteriorated, but the group keeps coming anyway.

The narrator has situated the following scene within a historical and contemporary Paris, but now he returns to the literary setting of the novel, filling out the imagined characteristics and inhabitants of real streets, such that Paris seems simultaneously known, familiar, and dizzyingly enigmatic.

Chapter 2 Laigle de Meaux and Joly are two good friends from among the group. On June 5th, they meet for breakfast at Corinthe with Grantaire, who quickly drinks half a bottle of wine. They talk of the procession that had just gone by, and then Grantaire begins rambling about women he's been with and wrongs that have been done to him. He dismisses talk of the revolution, saying that he can't imagine God could want to lead the human race through so many twists and turns and repeated revolts. Revolutions prove that God hasn't been able to make both ends meet, which means creation must be bankrupt.

Grantaire was the Friends of the ABC member who was more interested in being friends with Enjolras than in pursuing political and social questions. Grantaire's character is portrayed in a clearly disapproving light: he both challenges social revolution and mocks God's power—two major axes around which the novel itself turns. Grantaire is thus shown as simply spewing nonsense.

Joly and Laigle pay little attention to this lecture, and instead start discussing Marius's apparent love affair. Grantaire begins his next bottle and starts another speech, but at that moment a small ragged boy enters and asks Laigle if he is Monsieur Bossuet (his nickname). He says a tall blonde man on the boulevard said to tell Bossuet "ABC" from him. Laigle hands 20 sous to the boy, who says he's Gavroche's friend Navret. When the boy leaves, Grantaire begins to describe a list of categories of urban gamins, while Laigle muses that ABC must mean the burial of Lamarque. Rubbing his hands, Laigle says that now they'll touch up the 1830 revolution. Grantaire says he doesn't think much of this revolution: the government isn't fantastic, but it isn't evil either. The group stays at the tavern all day.

Paris has become an interlocking network of messengers, all of whom are helping spread the news about what's happening in the city. This friend of Gavroche's plays one part in this network. Grantaire's speeches, meanwhile, grow increasingly ridiculous. While Laigle and Joly are depicted as more serious, the novel seems to suggest that there's a thin line between entertainment and politics at this moment—the scene takes place in a tavern, after all. Hugo portrays this phenomenon ambivalently.

After midday, Grantaire moves on to other kinds of alcohol, and the others grow drunk as well. All at once, that evening, they hear a tumult and cries of "To arms!" They see an armed rabble running behind Courfeyrac and Gavroche down the Rue Saint-Denis. Bossuet shouts that they can make a barricade here in order to defend themselves from the National Guard as they continue to drum up support. Courfeyrac signals to the crowd to stop.

As Joly, Grantaire, and Laigle embrace the event's opportunity for entertainment, others are attempting to marshal a motley group into action and defense. These two elements merge at the tavern, in a reminder of the interconnectedness of Parisian social and political life.

Chapter 3 The street is narrow and well-adapted for a barricade. All the street's inhabitants immediately close their shutters and crouch inside, afraid. The crowd heaps up barrels and stones until they form a high rampart. Bossuet calls out to the driver of a traveling omnibus, and a minute later it's overturned in front of the barricade. The widow Hucheloup takes refuge on the second floor, and the serving-girl Mateloup tries to follow her. Grantaire catches her around the waist and exclaims that she's homely, with her lead-colored hair, and will fight well. Enjolras calls out to him angrily not to disgrace the barricade, to go drink somewhere else. Grantaire seems shocked and suddenly sober: he sits down and declares he'll sleep. Enjolras looks at him disdainfully, while Grantaire looks back tenderly and then falls asleep.

This scene portrays a mixture of military-style plotting, cheerful preparation for a battle, and pure chaos. The narrator shows how even Paris's residents are divided on whether or not to join those in revolt. By closing their shutters, the street's inhabitants make clear that, even if they're not ideologically against the group, they wish to have no part in a fight against the National Guard. Such a fight is probably doomed from the start anyway, because of the vast inequality in resources between the two camps.

Chapter 4 Courfeyrac reminds the widow Hucheloup how she was complaining about the law the other day, since she had had to pay a fine for a patron who shook a pane out of her window, and he says they're avenging her through the fight. The crowd smashes the street lanterns and builds several other barricades. It's a motley crew, but they all work together jovially even though they don't know each other's names. Gavroche is a kind of whirlwind, available everywhere at once, shouting orders and asking for a gun. He says he'll take Enjolras's if he dies first.

Just as Gavroche reminded the group of women why it's in their best interests to fight, Courfeyrac attempts to show why passersby such as the widow Hucheloup shouldn't mistrust the members of the uprising—instead, he claims, the group is acting on behalf of and in the interest of others who don't have the resources to speak for themselves. This seriousness of purpose coexists with a continued joviality.

Chapter 5 The front of the barricade is made of an impenetrable block of paving stones, beams, and planks. There is an opening on one extremity, where a red flag fastened to the pole of the omnibus flies over the barricade. Once this is finished, Courfeyrac puts a chest on a table outside the tavern, and begins distributing the cartridges inside it. The fighters load the guns, then lie in wait as twilight deepens, with a tragic, terrifying air about the neighborhood.

Red flags in French history are tied to leftist political movements—and decades after this event they'd be connected to communism—so this flag situates the group's barricade-building (another common element to Parisian riots) within a longer history and adds a greater political resonance.

Chapter 6 During these hours of waiting, the students recite love verses, one of which the narrator transcribes. Meanwhile, a torch is lit in the large barricade, illuminating the scarlet of the flag.

The narrator keeps his promise to record the idiosyncratic, personal touches within a broader historical and political narrative.

Chapter 7 The long wait suggests that the government is collecting its forces. Gavroche spies a man with a large musket who's entered the tavern. When the man sits down, Gavroche springs to his feet and begins to tiptoe around him, suddenly giddy and gleeful. At that moment, Enjolras accosts Gavroche, telling him to slip out to the streets to report on what's happening. As Gavroche is about to go off, he indicates the man in the tavern, and says he is a police spy.

Gavroche doesn't give away all his cards straightaway. Instead, he merely grows even more cheerful thanks to the special kind of knowledge that he's accustomed to using in order to make his way around Paris. Here, that means knowledge of who the policemen are, even when they try to disguise themselves.

Enjolras approaches the man and asks who he is. The man smiles disdainfully, saying that he's an agent of the authorities named Javert. Enjolras makes a sign to four men around him, who immediately throw Javert down and search him. They find a note from the police prefect, ordering Javert to find out whether the "malefactors" have established intrigues on the Right Bank, near the Jena bridge. The men tie Javert to a post in the room's center. Enjolras tells Javert that he'll be shot ten minutes before the barricade is taken; but they'll save their gunpowder for now.

Javert retains the same characteristics he's had from the start, including a kind of coldness linked to his loathing of shame. Javert is constantly on the front lines of the police force when attempting to penetrate Paris's underworld, whether of crime or of revolution, though this is the first time that Javert has allowed himself to enter a scene with a measure of vulnerability.

Chapter 8 The narrator feels obligated to relate an event that will help flesh out the picture of "social birth-pangs in a revolutionary birth." One man among the street crowd, whose name appears to be Le Cabuc, sits down in the wine-shop and looks at the large house at the edge of the barricade, exclaiming that they should shoot from there. The others tell him that the house is closed, so he says they should break it in. He races over, knocks, and then starts to batter the door with a gun. At that point, a tiny window opens on the third story, showing the terrified face of an old man—the porter—holding a candle. He says he cannot open the door, and repeats thus, not seeing Le Cabuc aiming his gun at him in the dark. Le Cabuc fires and immediately kills the man.

"Social birth-pangs" is the term that the narrator uses to describe how, even in the midst of a revolution whose goals may be just, evil still might occur. The Bishop of D--- had debated this phenomenon with the dying member of the revolutionary Convention, and here the theme returns, as the narrator describes a purely gratuitous, meaningless crime committed by Le Cabuc. This seems to be one of the peripheral figures the narrator had mentioned earlier, those who take advantage of moments of tumult to commit crimes.

Le Cabuc turns around to see a white-faced Enjolras, who orders him on his knees, and knocks him to the ground. Enjolras seems the embodiment of wrath. He tells the man he has one minute, then grabs Le Cabuc by the hair and shoots him in the head. Many of the onlookers turn their heads so as not to watch. A silence falls, and Enjolras declares that what Le Cabuc did and what he himself did are both horrible, but he had to kill the man, since insurrection must be disciplined. He obeyed justice in killing him, but now also must condemn himself. He says that in the future there will be no more ignorance nor retaliation: better things will come, and it is for that that they die now.

Enjolras seems here to enact a kind of pre-modern justice, an "eye for an eye" punishment. Yet he feels obligated to kill Le Cabuc not just because Le Cabuc killed someone else, but also because Le Cabuc's action threatens both the social harmony of the group in revolt and the broader social ideals that they're fighting for. Enjolras himself seems to despise this notion of justice, carrying it out even while holding out hope that another system might replace it.

Later, it will be determined that Le Cabuc was none other than Claquesous, who left no trace—his life was shadows and his end was night, according to the narrator. After this tragic episode, Courfeyrac catches sight of the small young man who had asked for Marius that morning.

Once again, night and darkness appear as the converse to the symbol of light, and are tied to evil, unhappiness, and lack of a moral system— here in the person of Claquesous, who literally once painted his face black as a disguise.

VOLUME 4, BOOK 13: MARIUS ENTERS THE SHADOW

Chapter 1 The voice that had summoned Marius to the barricades had come at an opportune moment, when he was mad with grief, desperate, and only wanting to die. Marius crosses the Esplanade and the Invalides Bridge, the Champs Elysees, and the Rue de Rivoli. Passing through the Rue Saint-Honoré, people are walking around and the shops are open as usual. But as he continues on to the Rue des Prouvaires, people no longer walk, instead huddling together and whispering. No candles burn in the windows. A little further on, piles of guns, bayonets, and troops fill the streets, but no curious observers.

Marius traverses a large segment of central Paris from the Left Bank to the Right Bank, and the narrator shows how segmented the city is by neighborhood, such that a scene of total gloom and disaster in one part of the city can be entirely ignored in another, even if they're geographically close to one another. The revolution's goal is to universalize social ideals, but at this point the group is very much constrained.

Marius sneaks across a street patrolled by National Guardsmen, attempting to make his way through the darkness. As he crosses the Rue du Contrat-Social, a bullet whistles by him and pierces the wall of a hairdresser's shop. He continues forward.

Marius's near-miss with the bullet comes at the "Street of the Social Contract"—a contract between government and people that now seems to be crumbling.

Chapter 2 The narrator paints an owl's-eye view of the city, beginning with the Halles quarter, an enormous dark hole in the center with no **light** or movement. All around it, swords and bayonets might be seen to gleam. The darkness is wild, the combatants invisible, and death seems close by and inevitable. This battle would have to be over the next day, so as to tell whether this would be a riot or a revolution. Nature seems to reflect the tone of the city: heavy clouds are on the horizon and the sky hangs low over the streets.

Victor Hugo's Romantic influences are clearest here, as nature itself is anthropomorphized (made to have living or human qualities) and the city is described as possessing a mood, a tone, and a certain atmosphere. The lack of light further suggests the moral ambiguity of this moment, in which it's still unclear which group is in the right.

Chapter 3 Marius reaches the Halles and sees a red glow, the reflection of the torch on the Corinthe barricade. He is one road away, but he pauses to think about his father, the heroic colonel, who had fought across Europe for France. He tells himself that it's now his turn to seek the enemy and be brave, though this time through civil war. He weeps bitterly, feeling that he cannot live without Cosette: he had promised he would die without her. He cannot abandon his friends or be untrue to his word, but he's ashamed at the degrading nature of the battle compared to his father's wars. But it occurs to him that he is still fighting for liberty, even if called civil war.

It's difficult for Marius to sort out how exactly his joining the barricades relates to his father's battles. His father fought under France's leader, not against the official French troops, whereas now, under another leader, Marius will be doing the opposite. Still, he finds a kind of reconciliation in the idea of France, which he relates to freedom, equality, and justice, and which can remain constant over time even as alliances and enemies change.


The narrator claims that there is no such thing as foreign or civil war, but only just or unjust war. War is necessary until true progress is achieved. It's only a disgrace when used against progress, reason, and truth. Driving out a tyrant or the English amounts to the same thing: repossession of one's territory. And when a tyrant falls in France one falls everywhere—thus such wars lead to peace. Marius mingles these logical, rational thoughts with his heartbreak and passion. He glances towards the inside of the barricade, and sees the man just killed by Le Cabuc in the third-story window, his bloody head bent over the street, as if surveying those about to die.

Civil war, to many, might suggest internal division and thus a kind of moral bankruptcy. For Hugo, however, a better way of judging war is not who is fighting against whom, but what they are fighting for. Still, the narrator notes how Marius can think about lofty, world-historical notions of war even while being simultaneously preoccupied with his own small tragedy. Often this is what melding historical and individual narrative means.


VOLUME 4, BOOK 14: THE GRANDEURS OF DESPAIR

Chapter 1 Just after ten o'clock, a young, merry voice sings a popular ditty. Enjolras and Combeferre realize that it's Gavroche, warning them. Gavroche arrives and says the enemy is here; he grabs Javert's gun. 43 insurgents kneel inside the barricade, six in the windows of the tavern. After several minutes, heavy, numerous footsteps become audible. From within the darkness, a voice asks, "Who goes there!" and Enjolras responds, "The French Revolution!" The street erupts in light as the army fires, felling the red flag and wounding several men through the barricade. Enjolras picks up the flag and asks who is bold enough to mount the flag again. No one answers.

Enjolras explicitly situates the group's identity and purpose within history, tying the barricaders to the French Revolution and thus claiming that they are only seeking to establish the "real" France: one of liberty and equality. The French Revolution as a symbol and rallying point has been claimed by various political groups throughout history, though, and Enjolras's claim (suggesting that the soldiers are not really French) is a major provocation.

Chapter 2 Since the arrival at Corinthe, Mabeuf has been installed behind the counter at the wine-shop, lost in thought. The mass firing of shots rouses him, however, and he crosses the threshold as Enjolras asks if anyone will volunteer to raise the flag. He strides up to Enjolras, grabs the flag, and begins to ascend the staircase of the barricade. All around him take off their hats. Mabeuf's wrinkled face, open mouth, and aged arm seem to make him a specter from '93. When he reaches the last step, he installs the flag and shouts, "Long live the Revolution! Long live the Republic!" A voice from the darkness calls out to him to retire. Mabeuf repeats his words and then is fired upon, and he falls backwards to the pavement.

Throughout the novel, Mabeuf has remained a peripheral character, occupied with his small loves and interests, but here he makes an active choice to insert himself into history. Without having anything else to live for, Mabeuf feels ready to die for the Republic. This is an example of enormous courage for the rest of the group, as Mabeuf martyrs himself, attempting to retrieve a kind of meaning lost in his life in his final moments before death.

Courfeyrac whispers to Enjolras that the man was not a member of the Convention of Terror, but was in fact a brave blockhead named Mabeuf. Enjolras raises his voice and proclaims that the man has set an example of courage. He shows the holes in Mabeuf's coat to the crowd and says this is now their flag.

To the others, Mabeuf underlines the relationship between the Revolution and their own efforts, though Courfeyrac and Enjolras are able to grasp the more complicated side of Mabeuf's actions.

Chapter 3 Several men bear Mabeuf's body to the table of the tavern. At once Gavroche shouts to look out—bayonets are rising over the barricade and almost taking it. The largest soldier marches on Gavroche with his bayonet. Gavroche fires with Javert's gun, but it isn't loaded, and the man laughs at him, before suddenly being struck by a bullet—the work of Marius, who's just entered.

Gavroche now begins to shed his childlike innocence and play a crucial part in the battle, serving as watchman and alerting others to possible dangers. The narrator suggests that the man who laughs at Gavroche might have gotten his proper revenge in being slain by Marius.

Chapter 4 Marius had not been able to hesitate after witnessing Mabeuf's death and the threat to Gavroche. As he enters the tavern, a soldier takes aim at him, but a young workman in velvet trousers lays a hand on the muzzle: the shot pierces the hand but doesn't strike Marius. Marius sees this happen in a confused way, but has no time to process it. Enjolras calls out to fire. Then Marius calls out from the second floor for the army to depart, or he'll blow up the barricade with the barrel of powder he holds. A sergeant cries that he'll blow up himself with it, and Marius agrees, dropping his torch towards the barrel. But the army flees back into the night.

As Marius enters the fray, events take place that are far more visible to the narrator (and reader) than to him and the other characters, for whom the battle is increasingly chaotic and desperate. Still, this desperation has some advantages for the rebels, since the National Guardsmen aren't sure what this group is capable of—if they'd be willing to blow themselves up, for example. The army isn't willing to take that chance, so the rebels briefly gain the upper hand.

Chapter 5 The group gathers around Marius, and Enjolras proclaims that he is now the leader. Cosette's loss, the fighting at the barricade, Mabeuf's martyrdom, and now Enjolras's proclamation all seem like a nightmare for Marius. He doesn't recognize or even see Javert. Meanwhile, the army is swarming around the end of the street, though they don't dare reenter. The insurgents realize that one of them, Jean Prouvaire, is missing, and must have been taken prisoner. Then they hear a voice calling "Long live France," and then a shot. Enjolras turns to Javert and says Javert's friends have just shot Jean Prouvaire.

For Marius, these scenes are taking place as in a dream, rather a "nightmare." His loss of Cosette, followed by Mabeuf's death, seems so terrible and unbelievable that he has trouble grasping that it's true. Meanwhile Enjolras turns to Javert, evidently to suggest that what his friends did to Jean Prouvaire must be done in return to Javert, enacting the kind of justice only suitable for the battlefield.


Chapter 6 Marius recalls another small, deserted barricade, and heads that way. A voice calls his name, and he looks around before seeing a figure crawling on the pavement: someone in a blouse and torn velvet trousers, collapsed in a pool of blood. It is Eponine, who says she is dying. Marius cries out that she is wounded, and he'll carry her inside. He asks what's wrong with her hand, and she says it's pierced with a bullet—she stopped the gun aimed at him. The bullet crossed her hand and went out through her back, she says. She simply wants him to sit down next to her.

Eponine has been described to us in the past few chapters as a pale, freckled young man. The velvet trousers allow us to trace her from Marius's home to the barricades, where she, like Mabeuf, decides to make one final move, inserting herself into history and ensuring that her last few moments before death will be spent with the person she loves: Marius.


Eponine says that she initially didn't know why he wanted to see that Rue Plumet house. He must think her ugly, she says. She had wanted to die before Marius, but now she's content—everyone will die, she says, but now she can remember all the times she's seen and talked to him. At that moment Gavroche again sings a popular song, and Eponine hears and says it's her brother, who must not see her or he'll scold her. Eponine seems to grow weaker, and she tells Marius that she has a letter for him that she was supposed to put in the post, but kept—she hopes he isn't angry. Marius takes the letter, and promises, according to what she asks, that he'll kiss her when she's dead. As she's about to die, she smiles and tells Marius that she was a little bit in love with him.

Eponine doesn't speak very intelligibly or logically, but it's clear that she's finally taking this opportunity, her last one, to confide in Marius about how much she loved him, implying how excruciating it has been for her to see his love for Cosette and to contribute to it in her own way. Several threads of the novel are thus tied together, as Marius discovers the relationship between Eponine and Gavroche, two figures of Paris's underworld who nevertheless found very different ways of inhabiting it.


Chapter 7 Marius keeps his promise and kisses Eponine. He lays her on the ground and goes to the tavern, where he sees a letter from Cosette giving her address from that night (June 4th), and saying she'll be in England in a week. It had all been Eponine's doing. She had disguised herself as a man, given Valjean the warning to leave his house, and had taken a letter from Cosette, who thought she was giving it to a young workman, with orders to deliver it to Marius's address. Eponine had waited for Marius at his home, but when Courfeyrac said they were going to the barricades, she had decided to join. There she had died with the tragic joy of jealous lovers who want to drag their beloveds into death with them.

It becomes evident that Eponine, in her final night alive, was torn between wanting to contribute to Marius's happiness and desiring to know her beloved's every secret, even if it meant concealing this letter from him, instead of giving it to him earlier. The narrator reminds us once again about the ambivalence of love, which can mean goodness and generosity but also lead to selfishness, thoughtlessness, and greed.

Marius is for a moment overjoyed that Cosette still loves him, but then somber again when he realizes that nothing can be done about their situation. He writes a note saying that their marriage was impossible, and that he now would die. On a second note he writes his name and grandfather's address, writing that his body should be taken there. Marius asks Gavroche to leave the barricade now and deliver the first letter tomorrow morning—the barricade will not be attacked until daybreak. Gavroche wants to stay, but can think of no reply. Gavroche runs off, thinking that he'll deliver the letter at once and then get back in time to fight.

Marius hasn't changed too much, as his thoughts immediately turn back to Cosette, and Eponine, despite her best attempts, is forgotten. Now Marius seems to have embraced his love for Cosette so much that he'll refuse to live without it. Gavroche, in turn, wants to be loyal to Marius, who saved his life, but he's also unwilling to retake the role of street gamin and miss out on this, his greatest adventure yet.

VOLUME 4, BOOK 15: THE RUE DE L'HOMME ARMÉ

Chapter 1 At that moment, Jean Valjean is experiencing interior convulsions comparable with the external convulsions of Paris. Cosette had resisted leaving the Rue Plumet, and the two had gone to bed at their new address in silence. That evening, Toussaint told Valjean that people were fighting in Paris, but he hadn't fully heard her, thinking rather of Cosette's happy future in London, and the safety they'd have abroad. Suddenly, in the mirror facing him, he saw the reflection of Cosette's blotting-book, where she had drafted her letter to Marius before copying out a final version to send to him.

Immediately the narrator makes an explicit analogy between history and individual narrative, here by suggesting how the two can echo each other in unexpected ways. In another of Hugo's classic coincidences, Valjean is able to learn about the love affair between Marius and Cosette by catching sight of the love letter she'd written to him, revealing the secret that they've successfully kept for weeks.

Now, Valjean—who has lost and sacrificed everything, and remained calm and stoic in every circumstance—seems finally, definitively blown over. He now experiences the loss of another kind of beloved. He can't imagine existing without Cosette. He begins to piece together certain circumstances and dates, and has no doubt that they all involve Marius (whose name he still doesn't know). He feels hate for the man—a feeling he hasn't known for so long. In his despair, he asks Toussaint if she hadn't said there was fighting going on. She says it's around Saint-Merry. A few minutes later, Valjean is in the street.

The narrator draws a connection between Valjean's feeling of loss and Marius's, though we are meant to understand Valjean's as far graver, since Cosette is truly the only source of love he's ever had, and he's managed to cling (even if tenuously) to the belief that his love for her may have redeemed him from his criminal past. Like Marius, Valjean seems to be drawn to the rioting because of his despair.

Chapter 2 Valjean pauses at his doorpost in despair, and is only shaken out of it by hearing the distant discharge of guns. Then he sees young Gavroche, apparently in search of something. Valjean asks what the matter is, and Gavroche says he's hungry. Gavroche then flings a stone at a street-lantern, and says that this is against regulations. Valjean lays a 100-sou piece in Gavroche's hand. Gavroche is astonished. He gazes at the coin, and then tells Valjean that he prefers to smash lanterns. Valjean tells him to keep the money for his mother, and Gavroche is touched, realizing that he wasn't being paid off to stop breaking lanterns.

This is the first time that Valjean and Gavroche meet—an ex-member and a proud member of Paris's underworld, respectively. Gavroche initially considers Valjean to be just another bourgeois, while Valjean can't help but press money into Gavroche's hand after he hears that Gavroche is hungry. Though Valjean himself has grown gentle, he does not condemn or judge the kind of exuberance that leads Gavroche to smash lanterns along the street.

Warming to Valjean, Gavroche asks him where No. 7 is. An idea coming to him, Valjean asks if he's bringing the letter he is expecting—a letter, rather, for Mademoiselle Cosette. Gavroche says he must know that the letter came from the barricades, and Valjean says he does. Valjean asks for the letter, as well as where the answer is to be sent. Gavroche tells him it's the barricade of the Rue de la Chanvrerie, and then he wanders away into the darkness.

Gavroche is obviously eager to get back to the fighting, so he jumps at the opportunity to rid himself of the letter and fulfill his obligation to Marius, who did, after all, just save his life. Valjean once again takes advantage of his skills in subterfuge to get the letter from Gavroche, as he suspects it holds more information on Cosette's unknown lover.

Chapter 3 Valjean goes inside with Marius' letter and reads only "I die. When thou readest this, my soul will be near thee." He feels a sudden joy at the death of this man that he hates—a death in which he's had no part. He only has to let things take their course. But having said this to himself, Valjean feels gloomy. An hour later, Valjean goes out in the costume of the National Guard, with a loaded gun under his arm.

This train of thought recalls precisely what Valjean (as Madeleine) had contemplated when he learned that Champmathieu was about to be prosecuted for a crime he didn't commit. The fact that Valjean now immediately turns gloomy, however, suggests that he won't take as long deliberating his actions this time.

Chapter 4 Meanwhile, Gavroche heads back to the barricades, singing. Suddenly he stops short, seeing a hand-cart by the side of the street and a drunken man from Auvergne sleeping within it. He thinks how perfect the cart would be for the barricade, and slowly tips the Auvergnat out. He writes a note saying that the French Republic received the cart, sign it Gavroche, and places it in the man's pocket.

In contrast to people like Thenardier, who steal out of greed or else for the pure malice of it, Gavroche is shown to retain a kind of innocence and sympathetic feistiness, treating his theft of the wheelbarrow as a kind of loan which he'll find a way to repay later.

Gavroche races off to the Halles, pushing the cart before him, which makes a great deal of noise. The National Guard squad wakes up, and the sergeant suggests that a whole band is out there. As he turns a street, he finds himself face to face with an armed man in uniform. Gavroche quickly recovers his pluck and starts to answer saucily to the guard's questions, finally saying that he's on his way to look for a doctor for his wife in labor. This infuriates the sergeant, who calls for his men to fire. Gavroche hurls the cart at him and races back down the street, now only concerned about how to reach the barricade in time.

Gavroche may think himself to be a seasoned warrior, but his carefree attitude suddenly catches up with him, even as he attempts to distract the National Guardsman with his jokes and wit. Gavroche is unwilling to part with his newly adopted hand-cart, the perfect accessory for battle, but he finally rids himself of this exciting illusion in order to scamper away and rejoin the barricade.

VOLUME 5, BOOK 1: THE WAR BETWEEN FOUR WALLS

Chapter 1 Paris's two most infamous barricades are not from 1832, but rather the insurrection of June 1848. The narrator notes that it's sometimes the common people, not the privileged, who suffer the most from such revolutionary violence. The insurrection of June 1848 was exceptional and difficult to classify. It attacked the republic, so it had to be combated, but ultimately it was the revolt of the people against themselves. It had two major barricades: at the Faubourg Saint-Antoine and at the Faubourg du Temple. Saint-Antoine was made out of all kinds of odds and ends and rubbish from the streets. The pell-mell of the barricade made it a symbol of the people's despair, confusion, and fury.

Once again, the narrator suggests that each historical moment must be judged on its own merits rather than condemning them all together. Here he suggests for the first time that insurrection might not be ideal even for the lower classes, whom the rebels are purportedly seeking to defend. We've already seen the relationship between the Faubourg Saint-Antoine and revolutionary activity, and here the narrator adds another neighborhood to the map of Paris in revolution.

Here, the people would attack revolution (universal suffrage, the assembly, the republic) in the name of revolution. Meanwhile, across the city at the Faubourg du Temple, the dazzling June sun illuminated the severe, silent, barricade there. This barricade, defended by 80 and attacked by 10,000, held out for three days. All the defenders were killed except for the leader, Barthelemy.

Hugo was against the revolutions of 1848, instead hoping for a slower, more gradual movement of change and progress. Hugo's own political beliefs find their way into the novel, of course, but this description also suggests that there was courage and nobility in the rebels' actions.

Courtnet, a brave, energetic man who had been a navy officer, had built the Antoine barricade. Barthelemy, a feeble, taciturn kind of street urchin who'd been in the galleys, constructed the Temple one. Later on, Barthelemy would duel Cournet in London and kill him, and then would be hanged.

These barricade builders seem to echo the kinds of men that embraced riot and revolution in June 1832 (the time of the novel). The narrator continues to stress the relationship between social unhappiness and revolt.

Chapter 2 The Rue de la Chanvrerie barricade, then, is only a bare outline of the later Paris barricades. That night, many of the insurgents take refuge and tend to the wounded in a neighboring house, while Enjolras remains with Javert in the tavern. At 2:00 in the morning there are still 37 men. Near dawn, they gain renewed energy, and Combeferre leads the conversation towards the Roman Emperor Caesar, who was betrayed and killed by the senator Brutus (among others). Combeferre says Caesar fell justly.

By making a brief excursion to talk about the 1848 revolution, the narrator is able both to compare and contrast this moment to later construction of barricades in Paris. The suggestion that Brutus was right to kill Caesar is a political claim, proposing that the members of the group have justice on their side in attempting to knock down those in power.

Chapter 3 Enjolras returns from making reconnaissance. He says that the entire army of Paris is ready to strike, and the populace has abandoned them. A voice from among the group shouts that they should build up the barricade and show that the republicans don't abandon the people, even if the people abandon the republicans.

The initial barricade fight was meant to give the fighters time for the rest of Paris to join them, so that it would really be the citizens versus the army. Unlike in other moments and circumstances, however, this time mot Parisians are too wary to join in the revolt.

Chapter 4 Enjolras says only thirty men should remain, so as to not waste more lives. Combeferre says they may all want to get themselves killed, but they must think of their wives and children. Suicide would only mean the murder of families that would grow helpless and wretched. They must not be selfish, he says. Marius raises his voice and says that the men are right, and those who have families should leave. Slowly, the men begin to point out others among their ranks, and five step out. There are only four National Guard uniforms in which they can hide, so they begin to quarrel over who will stay, but at once a fifth falls onto the ground: Valjean has just entered the barricade. Bossuet asks who he is, and Marius says gravely that he knows him. They all welcome him.

For these men, abandoning their posts would not only be the height of cowardice but would also mean another kind of sacrifice, in this case sacrificing the opportunity for honor, dignity, and courage. Like Marius (and Valjean), many came to the barricades expecting that they wouldn't get reinforcements from other Parisians, and that they'd die here. But this kind of sacrifice for a political goal—republicanism—is to be balanced with another kind of duty—one related to love and family.

Chapter 5 For a while, Enjolras's thought has been expanding: he is committed to progress and to both the French and human republic. He tells the other men to picture the future: equality, fraternity, peace, and harmony. When they have accomplished their task, they will have contributed to the dawn of truth and the unity of man: the sovereignty of man over himself, which is another word for liberty. This will begin with universal education, which will equip all with the tools to become equal and fight for justice, so that the twentieth century will not suffer the injustices of the nineteenth—it will be as if history had ended. If they die here, they'll die in the **light** of the future.

Enjolras returns to the kind of speeches he has been accustomed to making with the Friends of the ABC, but this time with a broader historical thrust behind it, as he situates what they're doing within other battles both in France and elsewhere, battles that have sought to attain basic rights for people. Much of this language can be traced to the rhetoric of the French Revolution, but there's also a confidence in the inevitability of progress (which Hugo himself espoused).

Chapter 6 Marius had been feeling as if he were already dead, but now he wonders why Fauchelevent (Valjean) is here. Meanwhile, Enjolras enters to give Javert a drink. Javert asks to be bound on a table rather than against the post. Javert raises his eyes and recognizes Jean Valjean: he's not even shocked.

This chapter is a shifting web of disguises and recognition, as Marius still thinks he knows who Valjean really is, and Javert does "discover" Valjean, although only when he himself is condemned to die.

Chapter 7 The insurgents increase the height of their barricades, and each is given a small drink of brandy. The men prepare for the attack silently, no longer hoping for victory. They fix their eyes on the edge of the street. Then a cannon appears, pushed by artillery-men. The entire barricade fires, but none of the artillery-men are struck. Bossuet shouts Bravo for their adversaries, and everyone claps. Combeferre notes that it's a new technology for the cannon. Suddenly, the artillery-men load and shoot the cannon, which dashes against the barricade but barely dents it. At that moment, Gavroche flings himself into the barricade, and everyone starts to laugh.

Now it seems that all the men who have remained are committed to dying here. Instead of hoping for victory, they recall the speech of Enjolras and place their own individual actions within a historical narrative of greater importance. Interestingly, it's at the moment of their somber acceptance of death that the group becomes more merry and cheerful, perhaps because they have nothing at all left to lose.

Chapter 8 Marius asks Gavroche what he's doing there, and Gavroche says he delivered the letter to the porter who was asleep. Marius asks if he knows that man (Valjean), and Gavroche lies and says no. Meanwhile, an infantry company appears at the end of the street, and the cannoneers re-load their weapon. The insurgents burst forward, but this time the cannon rips through the wall with grape-shot and kills two. Enjolras takes aim at the artillery sergeant, a young, gentle-looking man. Combeferre exclaims that this is a charming, thoughtful man who probably has a family and is in love—they shouldn't kill him. Enjolras says it must be done, and as a tear falls down his cheek, he fires and kills the man.

Although Gavroche had tried to follow Marius's instructions, his eagerness to return to battle made him complete his task a little sloppily. It's this very carelessness, however, that has given Valjean the opportunity to make his way to the barricade (for what, we're not yet entirely certain, though given earlier clues, it should have something to do with protecting Marius). Enjolras, once again, is uncomfortable with the system of justice and right promulgated in battle, but he makes himself follow this system all the same.

Chapter 9 The grape-shot will soon be the ruin of the insurgents, so they decide they must deaden the cannon blows. One old woman had placed her mattress in front of her window, foreseeing the bullets. Valjean fires at the ropes holding it up, and the mattress falls into the street, though outside the barricade. Valjean steps out into the street, amid a rain of bullets, and carries it back to the barricade. The next cannon-shot is dulled by the mattress.

This is the first time Valjean enters and plays a strategic role in the battle, though it's not by harming anyone—even though he does risk harm himself by carrying the mattress across the barricades. Once again Valjean relies upon skills, like an accurate shot, that were developed with less noble purposes years before.


Chapter 10 At that moment Cosette awakens, having dreamed of Marius, whom she is sure has received her letter and will find a way of seeing her. Cosette gets dressed and opens her window. At once she bursts into tears, having a sudden inkling of something terrible happening. Below her window is a bird's nest, and Cosette slowly grows calm again while looking at the birds.

The narrator abruptly shifts to another area of Paris, one devoid of the chaos and danger of the barricade, but still the site of Cosette's emotional turmoil and worry. Cosette is treated as loving and pure, but also rather simple—free from the grave moral decisions of those like Marius and Valjean.

Chapter 11 The army continues to fire, hoping to exhaust the insurgents' ammunition. Valjean shoots the helmet off one sentinel perched on a chimney, terrifying him into descending. Bossuet asks why Valjean didn't kill him, but Valjean doesn't reply.

Bossuet is the first to realize that, while Valjean has played a crucial role in protecting others, even risking harm to himself, he is not actively harming others among the "enemy."

Chapter 12 The narrator notes that the National Guard is known to be zealous against insurrections. At times like these, "civilization" (represented by multiple interests rather than a few strong principles) believes that it is in danger, and this leads to swift action—including the execution of an insurgent like Jean Prouvaire after just five minutes.

The narrator suggests through this passage that "civilization" may not have the monopoly on moral upstandingness that it's assumed to have, especially when it descends from principles to interest groups characterized by desperation rather than by strong values.



On June 6th, the National Guard company is commanded by Captain Fannicot, a fanatical supporter of the government who hopes to defeat the insurgents on his own. He sends his company rushing down the street, but the insurgents immediately open fire and kill a number of men, including Fannicot. Enjolras is irritated that their ammunition is being used up for nothing. Unlike large armies, insurrectionists must count their cartridge-boxes. This means that barricades are usually crushed in the end, though sometimes the improbable does happen.

The narrator has already detailed characters like Claquesous/Le Cabuc, who escape the high-minded values of the rebellion's leaders and take advantage of the chaos of revolutionary times. The narrator suggests that Fannicot is another species of this type, defined rather by hubris and thoughtlessness in leading his men into certain death.

Chapter 13 Enjolras cries that Paris seems to be waking up: new barricades are built on other streets, and on the Rue Saint-Denis a woman fires on the army from behind a window. In the Rue Planche-Mibray, women throw old pottery-pieces and utensils onto the soldiers. The army has to stamp out flares on multiple sides. But in less than half an hour, the National Guard seems to have succeeded.

The narrator has noted how quickly rebellion can rise and fall, and this seems to be one example in which a certain crescendo seems to be established before dying away just as quickly. Such unexpected rhythms seem to define the revolutionary experience for Hugo.

Chapter 14 Courfeyrac and Bossuet are in increasingly good humor. Bossuet laughs at how Enjolras manages to be great and brave without a mistress making him so. Suddenly, they hear another cannon at a distance, attacking the Saint-Merry barricade. The insurgents fire upon the artillery, but Enjolras shakes his head and says that in 15 minutes there will be no cartridges left in the barricade.

Again the members of the Friends of the ABC, having somberly accepted their own likely deaths, are now freed from further seriousness and can find humor and merriment within their dire situations. This is even more apparent with the knowledge that when the cartridges run out, they're truly lost.

Chapter 15 Gavroche, having overheard this, slips out of the barricade and starts emptying the cartridge-boxes of the soldiers that have been killed. Courfeyrac calls out at him to come back inside. Gavroche crawls on his belly, taking advantage of his small size. Bullets begin to rain down around him, and he begins to sing, taking pleasure in teasing and distracting the artillery-men, who laugh as they aim. He plays hide and seek with death, but finally a bullet strikes him. He staggers, then falls. The whole barricade cries out, but Gavroche rises again and begins to sing. He does not finish his song, however. A second bullet strikes him, and he falls.

Gavroche has been constantly looking for a way to prove himself, to claim a place as one of the "real" fighters rather than simply a gamin from the streets. Here, the narrator touchingly describes the mix of jovial playfulness and utter courage that characterizes Gavroche's movements. The official army's laughter becomes a sobering perversion of Gavroche's own humor, even as he is shown as sacrificing himself for a greater cause.

Chapter 16 At that moment two small children are walking along the Luxembourg garden. These are the boys whom Gavroche had taken in—Thenardier's, leased out to Magnon. On the morning of June 6th, the Luxembourg is sunny and charming, the statues robed with **shadow and light**. The abundance of light is somehow reassuring, and the recent rain seems to make everything gleam even more.

Once again, the narrator shifts rapidly to another scene in Paris, where the horrors and chaos of the barricades might as well be nonexistent—yet through the motifs of shadow and light, it's suggested that there are places for goodness and evil throughout the city at any given moment.

The small boy says he's hungry, and they watch a bourgeois leading his 6-year-old, who is dressed as a National Guardsman. They stop to watch the swans, and the son takes a bite of his brioche and spits it out, crying, saying he's not hungry anymore. The father tells him to throw it to the swans, and the cake falls near the edge. At that moment, drum-beats and clamors can be heard from afar, and the pair departs. Meanwhile, the two little boys approach the water's edge. The elder one leans over and grabs the brioche, beating away the swans, and gives it to his brother.

While the members of the National Guard are the enemies on the barricade, we can also see how such figures of official authority (like Javert) are often unthinkingly venerated. The sound of the barricades becomes audible just as the boy desperately tries to grab a piece of bread—suggesting that there's a connection between their desperation and what the rebels are fighting for.

Chapter 17 Marius dashes out of the barricade, but it's too late: Gavroche is dead. Marius barely notices that a bullet has grazed his head, and Courfeyrac bandages it when he returns. Combeferre whispers to Enjolras that the man (Valjean) finds an odd way of defending the barricade even while refraining from killing anyone. It's a tranquil moment within the tavern as a firestorm rages outside.

Back on the barricade, Marius and the others barely have time to recover from the death of Gavroche before turning to the next issue: the enigmatic presence of Valjean, and why he is fighting but not killing (a reason that the reader understands far better).

Chapter 18 The narrator notes that a barricade creates a kind of dreamscape, into which one may enter without remembering any of the death and shadows outside of it. The clock strikes midday. Enjolras orders the men to carry stones up to the roofs of the houses. They barricade the window below and secure the wine-shop's doors. Enjolras tells Marius to stay outside and observe. When the drum beats the assault, the men will rush from the tavern to the barricade. The last man to leave will smash Javert's skull. Valjean steps forward and asks to be one the one to kill him, and Enjolras doesn't object.

Knowing that they're certain to die, the men take every opportunity to ensure that they'll kill as many National Guardsmen as possible before being definitively vanquished. To Enjolras, it may seem that Valjean has debts to settle with Javert, which would account for the strangeness of his presence at the barricades, but the narrator, of course, wants us to grasp that something else is most likely going on.

Chapter 19 Valjean is left alone with Javert. He unties the rope. Valjean drags him out of the wine shop, and Marius sees them pass into the Mondetour lane. Valjean and Javert catch sight of a woman's body—Eponine. Javert says he believes he knows her. He tells Valjean to take his revenge. Instead, Valjean cuts Javert's cords and says he is free.

For Javert, the only reason for Valjean's presence that he can comprehend is the desire to seek revenge, following a system of justice that may be outside the law, but that still relies on judgment and condemnation rather than on mercy.

Javert remains open-mouthed as Valjean tells him his address, in case he should escape. Javert, snarling, buttons up his coat and sets out. Turning around, he shouts that Valjean annoys him—Valjean should kill him. Valjean tells him to be off, fires his pistol into the air, and returns to the barricade.

Javert is both overwhelmingly confused and enraged by Valjean's decision, which fails to conform to the entire system of justice and revenge that Javert has spent his whole life defending.

Meanwhile, Marius had realized the inspector was the very man whom he had approached about the Thenardier affair. He had asked Enjolras what the man's name was, and he'd answered Javert. Marius had sprung to his feet, but then heard the pistol shot and Valjean's declaration that "It is done." Marius then felt a gloomy chill.

In another example of dramatic irony, the reader is more knowledgeable than Marius about what really took place between Javert and Valjean. Marius believes that Valjean (for him, Fauchelevent) enacted his revenge against Javert.

Chapter 20 The "death-hour" of the barricade is approaching, as the masses disown the movement and abandon the insurrection. The houses of the Rue de la Chanvrerie are now closed to the insurgents: fear prevents hospitality. When the search for utopia grows impatient and turns to revolt, it's almost always too soon, so it becomes resigned and stoically yields to catastrophe. Nevertheless, progress is a general human law, so there's no reason to despair. Even after catastrophe, it turns out that ground has been gained.

In the crucial first part of the barricade fighting, it still seemed possible that all of Paris would rise up with the rebels, but now it's apparent that those in revolt have failed to inspire a city-wide uprising. However, for Hugo, such an uprising would not necessarily do more than a small revolt, which still pushes society one step further towards progress.

However, the narrator notes, sometimes individuals resist the eternal life of the human race. People want to conserve their calm, material possessions, or family life. Insurgents play with death and sometimes err, and yet the narrator says these men are to be admired—especially when they fail. Others may accuse them of criminality; the narrator agrees that peaceful solutions are better, but these men are admirable for their commitment to progress and their courage in facing death. None of the insurgents hated Louis Philippe, but they attacked the idea of divine right in kings, believing that a Paris without kings would result in a world without tyrants.

Once again, the book reveals a complex and ambivalent attitude towards revolutionary activity. We've already seen how much suffering and crime can result, even if unwittingly, from such events, and Hugo can't bring himself to condone that. Yet at the same time (according to the novel), it's possible to stand for peace and against war even while respecting the individual courage of those who fight for progress (though they may not go about it in the "right" way).

The narrator claims that France's grandeur and beauty comes from its love of artistic beauty, another way of saying its ability to see the **light**. In the future, art will be supported by science and both will work for social betterment. The book which the reader has in his hands—*Les Misérables* itself—is part of a march, however winding and cut through by exceptions, of evil to good, unjust to just, night to day.

Here Hugo situates his own novel, a work of art, within the general historical march of progress, which paradoxically is both inevitable and has to be fought for. For the first time, art enters into the idea of social "light" and progress, in addition to material progress.

Chapter 21 The army throws itself on the barricade, which holds firm. As the soldiers retreat, the insurgents fire rapidly at them. Courfeyrac and Bossuet remain in good humor, even as the army closes in around the barricade. The insurgents haven't slept or eaten for 24 hours, and have only a few more rounds left, but the barricade is attacked 10 times without being captured. The narrator compares it to the battle of Troy. Bossuet, Feuilly, Courfeyrac, and Combeferre are killed. Marius is still fighting but is riddled with wounds. Only Enjolras isn't struck.

To the very end, the Friends of the ABC maintain their particular mix of sarcasm, humor, and earnest political belief. By comparing the barricade fighting to the battle of Troy, the narrator elevates this event to mighty and historical levels, suggesting that the fighters should be considered as courageous and heroic as those warriors of history whom we tend to think of as heroes.

Chapter 22 When only Enjolras and Marius remain of the leaders at the two edges, the center of the barricade gives way. A final assault succeeds, and the insurgents retreat confusedly, attempting to enter a locked house. Enjolras shouts at them to enter the wine-shop, and they slam the door to the assailants. Marius alone remains outside, having just been struck on the collarbone and about to faint.

The battle is described in acute detail, as it becomes clear to everyone involved that there is little chance for the rebels to emerge alive. Enjolras seems almost to suffer from being one of the only ones to survive, as he had been eager to condemn himself after feeling obliged to kill Le Cabuc.

The soldiers begin to lay siege to the wine-shop. They are enraged by the death of their sergeant and by rumors that there's a headless body of a soldier inside the tavern. Enjolras tells the others that they'll sell their lives dearly, and then he kisses Mabeuf's hand (the only kiss he's given in his life). They rain paving-stones down from the windows. Finally the door yields and the assailants rush in, but don't find a single insurgent. They've gone to the second floor, and now fire down their last cartridges and then take up clubs. The battle becomes monstrous and ignoble.

Mabeuf has become, as he perhaps had hoped to do, a martyr for the insurgents and an example of courage and heroism that they want to follow. Enjolras's own bravery is juxtaposed with his youth—he's spent so much time in political affairs that he hasn't even had time for love. While the narrator has underlined the noble nature of the battle, now he suggests that at its end it loses all dignity.

Chapter 23 By the time the soldiers reach the second floor, they find only Enjolras still on his feet. He flings away his club and tells the men to shoot him. Suddenly, the chaos stills into solemnity, with the soldiers impressed by the majesty of the disarmed man. A National Guardsman lowers his gun, saying it seems he is about to shoot a flower.

The last fighter surviving, Enjolras suddenly epitomizes for the soldiers the vulnerable, ephemeral nature of the insurgents that they've spent over twenty-four hours waging war against, and the vast inequality of resources between the two sides becomes apparent.

At that moment, Grantaire—who had been in a drunken sleep since the previous evening—wakes up. A soldier shouts to take aim at Enjolras, and Grantaire cries, "Long live the Republic!" and crosses the room to stand beside Enjolras, who presses his hand, smiling. Enjolras is hit with eight bullets, and he and Grantaire fall. The soldiers find and kill the others in the attic, and then search out the fugitives.

Grantaire has been portrayed as somewhat ridiculous throughout the book, but here, by taking his place beside Enjolras and proclaiming his loyalty to the Republic, it's suggested that he redeems his earlier actions and takes on a kind of heroism himself.

Chapter 24 At the moment of losing consciousness, Marius had felt the grasp of Jean Valjean, whose role in the battle was only to search out and care for the wounded. As soon as Marius fell, Valjean carried him off behind the Corinthe building. Now Valjean surveys the barricade, the street, and the wine-shop, bewildered at how to extricate himself and Marius. Then he sees an iron grating on the pavement, covering a shallow hole. Valjean lifts Marius into the hole and then lowers himself in. They find themselves in a long, underground corridor.

As Enjolras and Grantaire fall, the battle is definitively lost. Marius has survived, but only by being wounded and fainting outside the tavern shop, the last place of defense. Now it becomes clear what Valjean's true role was in the battle—not only to ease the suffering of the fighters as much as possible, but also to keep an eye on Marius—even though he hates him—and to ensure, for Cosette's sake, that he won't be harmed.

VOLUME 5, BOOK 2: THE LAND IMPOVERISHED BY THE SEA

Chapter 1 The narrator calls Paris's sewer system its intestine—heaps of filth and mud that could directly contribute to flowery meadows and nourished earth, were they not to be deposited through France's rivers into the Atlantic. If only a drainage system could conduct pure water from fields into the cities, and send human waste back to the fields, production would increase and the problem of misery would be lightened. Instead, there is waste and disease. Beneath one Paris is another Paris of sewers, with its own streets, squares, alleys, and circulation of filth.

Hugo interjects a specific idea for social progress, questioning the idea of "waste" by showing how something that people tend to recoil against could actually prove beneficial and could combat social misery. He also begins to describe a parallel city here, though one of darkness rather than light, suggesting its association with evil and wretchedness.

Chapter 2 If Paris were to be lifted off like a cover, the sewers would look like a large tree grafted onto the river, with branches and twigs stemming out of it. The sewer of Paris is ancient and impressive, notes the narrator. It has served as a tomb and an asylum, a hiding place for thieves. The narrator calls it the "conscience of the city," with **shadows** but no longer secrets. All civilization's filth is laid bare, rather than concealed as above ground. The social observer, then, should enter the sewers so as to better understand society, and reconstruct the city from the cesspool.

We've already seen how Paris is an intricate network of streets and alleys, one that often proves overwhelming to the many but can be mastered by the few. Like this aboveground Paris, the underground city of sewers may reveal unpalatable realities about society, but as usual, the narrator stresses the importance of looking these realities straight in the face in order to understand them.

Chapter 3 At some times in Paris's history the sewer has been flooded, sending filth back into the city and spreading mud across the plazas and streets. Even at the beginning of the 19th century the sewer was a mysterious place, where few people ventured or cared to think about trying to clear. The sewer was considered the lower world. Nevertheless, one day in 1805, the Minister of the Interior told Napoleon that an intrepid man had declared he wanted to visit the sewers of Paris. This man's name was Bruneseau.

The narrator makes another historical excursion, this time to trace the development of the sewer system and show its relationship to other social realities of the time. Returning to the age of Napoleon (and that of Marius's father), we are introduced to Bruneseau as an almost heroic figure, the only one willing to enter darkness in order to truly understand it.

Chapter 4 Once Bruneseau had crossed the threshold of the sewers, eight out of twenty laborers refused to follow him further. The job necessitated cleaning, counting grates and vents, mapping the branches, and tracking the currents. They found vaults from the 17th and 18th centuries and the hollows of ancient dungeons. The visit took seven years, from 1805 to 1812, and during this time the entire sewer was disinfected, tamed to some extent, so that it was no longer the terrifying, wild cavern of the past.

Just as the Paris of above ground would slowly lose some of its mysterious alleyways and wild character over the course of the 19th century, so the underground city of the sewers is shown to have been somewhat tamed as well. This process is one of progress, but as we've seen, Hugo also retains some nostalgia for the wildness of the Paris of the past.

Chapter 5 Today the sewer is clean and cold. It's been transformed by a man the world forgets: Bruneseau.

Again, history is often only understandable by studying individual figures within it.

Chapter 6 However, Paris's underground labyrinth is now ten times as large as it was at the start of the century. The ground upon which the city is built is inhospitable to the construction of sewers, difficult to dig into but quick to crumble. In 1832, the cholera epidemic—which led to a vast sewer reconstruction—had not yet arrived. So in some places it was still the same sewer of antiquity, with enormous ditches and uneven terrain, a cesspool of disease.

Even despite Bruneseau's now-better-understood reforms, the sewer is still shown to be a place of disease, filth, and danger, difficult to traverse and assumed to be just as wild as it was in the ancient past. The cholera epidemic would in fact contribute to a major modernization of Paris so as to limit such disease.

VOLUME 5, BOOK 3: MUD BUT THE SOUL

Chapter 1 It is in these sewers that Valjean finds himself, passing from midday **light** to pure **darkness**. He is blinded by it, but slowly grows accustomed to the dark. He makes his way into a wall of fog, eventually reaching a fork in the path. The only clue to his direction is the slope, since going downhill would lead to the river. If he follows the slope left, he reasons, he'll arrive at the Seine around the Pont-Neuf, one of the most densely populated areas of Paris. He turns right, trusting fate.

After a historical aside to understand the context of Valjean's current setting, we are better positioned to understand just how treacherous this underground city is for the characters. Still, Valjean is concerned with making sure he can save Marius, so he knows he cannot simply emerge in a populous part of Paris.

As Valjean drags Marius, he can feel the latter's breath on his cheek, confirming that he's still alive. Valjean believes he's under the Rue Saint-Denis, which runs straight to the Grand Sewer, but he's actually in the Montmartre sewer, one of the most labyrinthine of the city. Valjean is slowly overcome by gloom, almost horror. He doesn't know if Marius will die, if someone else will penetrate the sewer, or if they'll both be lost and die. Suddenly, he realizes he's now descending, but he knows it's more dangerous to retreat than to continue on.

The narrator acquaints us with the true layout of the sewers, a labyrinth that can be seen through a bird's-eye view of Paris, though one that remains unknowable to Valjean, who must instead wander blindly through the sewers. For the first time in much of the novel, we see Valjean in a state of lack of control, not knowing what will happen next or what he can do to stop it.

At some point Valjean realizes that he's returning to the peaceful part of the city, and hears vehicles and sounds of daily life overhead. Suddenly he sees a shadow in front of him. He turns around and sees eight or ten shadowy policemen moving behind him.

This is another reminder of the huge disparities in life even within geographically contiguous parts of the city, where peace above can easily yield to danger below.

Chapter 2 On June 6th, the police had ordered the sewers to be searched, since it was assumed that the insurgents might take refuge there. While Valjean can see the patrol through their lantern, he remains in the shadow. The sergeant gives orders to turn left towards the Seine, and Valjean remains crouched behind them.

The sewers have already been characterized as a home for thieves and criminals, so it's here that the police descend, having linked the insurgency to general criminality in the city.

Chapter 3 The policemen of Paris had maintained their regular service even in the midst of insurrection. That afternoon, two men could be seen on the banks of the Seine, one trying to overtake the other, but waiting to seize him until the other might reveal some important criminal meeting-place. The policeman made a sign to the driver of a hackney-coach, who followed them. The first man, in rags, did not climb to the Champs-Elysees (ideal for escaping), but instead continued along the quay towards the Pont de Jena. He ducked behind a pile of rubbish at the water's edge, and the policeman lost sight of him—he'd disappeared. But then he'd looked below him and seen iron bars leading to a dark vaulted corridor.

This chapter is purposefully oblique and confusing. We're meant simply to see two men, a policeman and another, probably a criminal, continue along the streets of Paris until the criminal disappears belowground—into the very sewers where Valjean is wandering at the same time. Though we don't know who the men are, we can assume that one or both of them will re-enter the story, most likely in terms of Valjean's trajectory within the sewers underground.

Chapter 4 Valjean resumes his march, stumbling along in the darkness. His monumental strength finally begins to give way. At about 3 a.m. he reaches the belt-sewer, with four paths ahead of him. He chooses the broadest, deciding he must descend to the Seine despite the risks. This was the right decision, for had he ascended he'd have reached a wall.

Returning to Valjean, the narrator again distinguishes Valjean's ignorance from the narrator's (and our own) knowledge of the sewers. By creating this gap, he increases the dramatic irony and tension of the passage.

Valjean stops to rest a little further on, and he puts his hand on Marius's heart, which is still beating. He dresses Marius's wounds and then looks at him with total hatred. He finds the note in his pocket asking that his body be carried to Gillenormand's address. Valjean continues on, gradually becoming aware, with the growing intermittency of vehicles overhead, that he must have reached the city outskirts.

There's an obvious contrast between Valjean's careful attention to Marius and the way he feels about the young man. It is Valjean's love for Cosette, not his hatred for Marius, that propels him forward, suggesting that moral correctness doesn't always require an unblemished conscience.

Chapter 5 The narrator compares Valjean to a walker along a beach who slowly realizes that it's grown more difficult to walk, though his eyes haven't perceived any change. He turns back to shore, uneasy, and begins to sink into the sand, suddenly realizing that he's caught in quicksand. If he's all alone he's condemned to be engulfed by the tide, but only slowly, over the course of hours. This fate, the narrator notes, was also possible in Paris's sewers, with a mix of earth and water creating a kind of quicksand—a truly terrible way to die.

Suddenly Valjean is faced with an even more ominous challenge than the general darkness and gloom of the sewers. This entire sequence can be understood as a parable, not only for Valjean's own journey through moral darkness, but also for society's wretchedness and misery, in which various obstacles make progress towards the light difficult.

Chapter 6 Valjean now finds himself in such an area of the sewer, as a result of the previous day's rain. He enters the slime, knowing it's impossible to retrace his steps. But the water soon comes to his waist, the slime to his knees. He feels he is sinking, and he holds Marius up. Suddenly his foot strikes something solid. Valjean climbs back up, pauses, and prays.

Rather than turning back when facing such obstacles, Valjean charges forward, in another reminder that progress may be temporarily stymied or slowed, but is inevitable as long as members of society embrace it.

Chapter 7 Valjean sets out again, though he's exhausted by this effort. After a hundred paces, he raises his eyes, and at the end of the vault sees **daylight**. No longer is Valjean conscious of his fatigue or of Marius's weight. He reaches the outlet and stops: there's no way to get out. The arch is closed by a grating, which is clamped by a thick, rusty double-lock, like those used in the prison.

After escaping the policemen, finding his way through the labyrinth, and emerging from the danger of the quicksand, it appears that Valjean has now been definitively barred from the light, which appears all the more excruciatingly distant precisely because he can see it.

Valjean lays Marius down by the wall and seizes each bar, but none of them move. He asks himself how he can retrace his steps, survive the quagmire from before, avoid the police patrol, and then reach other outlets that would undoubtedly be barred like this one. Valjean turns his back to the grating and slides to the floor. He thinks only of Cosette.

Valjean understands that, while it seems he has no hope to reach the light, neither can he return through the various obstacles that had blocked his way. Love for Cosette is shown to be the only thing that sustains him in this moment of hopelessness.

Chapter 8 Suddenly a hand is laid of Valjean's shoulder, and a low voice says to him, "Half shares." Valjean thinks he's dreaming, but a man is in front of him: Thenardier. Valjean is so disfigured and bleeding that Thenardier doesn't recognize him. Thenardier asks how he'll manage to get out. Thenardier says he has the key. He assumes that Valjean has killed the man (Marius) for his money, so if he gives Thenardier half, he'll open the door. Valjean was clever not to have pushed his victim into the mire, Thenardier goes on—the workmen who will arrive tomorrow could trace him back to the assassin. Valjean searches Marius's pockets, and only finds a few francs, which Thenardier takes. He then swings open the gate and allows Valjean to pass out.

Now it's become clear who one of the shadowy figures on the Paris quay must have been—Thenardier, escaping the policeman by descending into the gutters. As usual, Thenardier views other people's distress only in terms of how it can benefit him. He also is quick to assume that anyone prowling the sewers of Paris is, like him, a member of the city's criminal underworld, where murder is accepted and only the laws of greed triumph. Such an assumption, in this case, actually benefits Valjean.

Chapter 9 All at once, Valjean can breathe easily again. Night is coming on and a few stars can be seen in the sky. Valjean is overtaken by a feeling of serenity, though it's quickly followed by unease: he turns around, and sees a tall man carrying a bludgeon—Javert. Javert had been in pursuit of Thenardier, who had disappeared. Thenardier had then allowed Valjean out of the sewer, knowing that Javert waited above. Javert doesn't recognize Valjean, who nevertheless tells him his name. He tells Javert to take him, but to grant him one favor—help him carry Marius to his home. Javert mutters that this man was at the barricade. Javert calls to the coachman of the hackney. The three enter and set out in the coach.

The second part of the mystery described in Chapter 3 is now resolved, and Thenardier's "generosity" in letting Valjean out for money takes on a more sinister quality. Valjean could have maintained his disguise before Javert, but his desire to conceal himself and his past has disappeared, as he'd already given Javert his address in case he escaped alive. It's already surprising that Javert agrees to allow Valjean to deposit Marius safely home—perhaps some of the mercy shown by Valjean is having an effect.

Chapter 10 The trio arrives at the Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire. Javert addresses the porter, saying that Gillenormand's son is brought back, dead. The porter doesn't seem to understand, but wakes up Marius's great-aunt Gillenormand, and Basque goes in search of a doctor. Javert touches Valjean's shoulder, and they descend the stairs. Valjean asks Javert one more favor: let him go home for an instant.

Several more threads in the novel converge, as Javert and Valjean find themselves with Marius at the home of Gillenormand. Javert and Valjean have an unspoken understanding now, that this is one of Valjean's final moments of liberty before falling into the hands of "justice."

Chapter 11 Valjean wants to tell Cosette where Marius is and to warn her of what is to come. Suicide is impossible to him: he merely accepts his fate. As they arrive, Javert tells Valjean that he'll wait for him below. Valjean ascends the stairs, and then looks out the window from the second floor. Javert has gone.

Valjean is convinced that his long road towards redemption is now over, and he must give up his freedom and give up Cosette. He cannot imagine that Javert will suddenly, inexplicably, abandon his pursuit of justice.

Chapter 12 Meanwhile, Marius is carried into the living room. He has a shallow wound in his ribs, slashes on his arms, and a broken collarbone. It's unclear how serious the cuts on his head may be. Basque prepares bandages as the doctor inspects the patient. Then a pale figure creeps around the door: the old man Gillenormand. He gazes at Marius, astonished, and exclaims that he is dead. Gillenormand wrings his hands and cries that he's gotten himself killed on the barricades out of hatred for his grandfather—only to cause him misery. The doctor takes his arm, as he calms down and begins to reproach Marius in a low but agonizing voice.

There's a confusion throughout this scene, both as a result of Marius's serious wounds and the fact that Javert had announced that Marius was already dead (a mistake also made by Thenardier in the sewers). Gillenormand, as usual, is portrayed as somewhat ridiculous, though he has never stopped loving his grandson, even as he continues to blame Marius's revolutionary activities both for his grandson's death and for his own misery.

Gillenormand says that instead of dancing and carousing, as a twenty-year-old should do, Marius has gotten himself killed for the Republic—a reason to drive Gillenormand mad. He yells at Marius that he will not even grieve over his death. At that moment, Marius's eyes open, and Gillenormand cries out to his "child" and "well-beloved son," ecstatic that he's alive—and then he faints.

Gillenormand and Marius have long held fundamentally different views on politics, women, and how to lead a life, and these differences have already foiled one attempted reconciliation. However, the entrenched differences also coexist with Gillenormand's love for Marius, as this melodramatic scene shows.

VOLUME 5, BOOK 4: JAVERT DERAILED

Chapter 1 Javert walks down Valjean's street, his head drooping. He takes the shortest way to the Seine, stopping at the angle of the Notre-Dame bridge. For the past several hours, Javert has been in excruciating inner turmoil. For the first time in his life, his conscience is divided. He shudders at what he has just done—gone against all regulations and social organization in releasing Valjean. Though he ought to have imprisoned him, he felt he could not. He cannot wrap his head around the fact that, now, both he and Valjean have put themselves above the law.

We re-catch up with Javert immediately after he's left Valjean's house, giving up the opportunity to finally arrest Valjean. Already, allowing Valjean a few moments of liberty at Marius's home and at his own home went against everything Javert believed about the sanctity and severity of the law. Now he continues to cling to that system of justice even while knowing that he's flouted it.

Javert cannot understand Valjean through the values that have guided his life. Javert recalls Madeleine, and begins, against his will, to admire the convict. That the man is a convict but is gentle, merciful rather than full of hatred, willing to save the man who had condemned him—all this proves unexplainable to Javert. Javert is anguished because he's no longer certain. A whole new world of facts and possibilities, characterized by respect, kindness, lack of condemnation, and a different kind of justice, is opening to him. He has to acknowledge that the convict is good, and that he himself is a coward. He asks what there might be beyond duty, but is too afraid at this line of thinking to go further.

Throughout the book, several systems of justice have coexisted, but none of the characters (with the exception of Valjean in his early conversion through the Bishop of D---) have really questioned or challenged their own adherence to these systems. Now, Javert begins to recognize the multiplicity of ways of thinking about justice. He feels so overwhelmed because by transforming his sense of justice, he would have to modify his entire worldview and way of living.

Javert feels that he now has a new superior other than the police chief—God—but he doesn't know how to act in front of this new authority, or how to hand in his resignation to God for having committed great infractions against this new law. His soul is being derailed, and he feels that God is creating a state of anarchy. He sees only two ways of escaping his despair. One is to recapture Valjean and send him back to the galleys.

Hugo, whose two major totems of belief are God and social justice, has Javert's transformation take place in both realms, the earthly and the divine. For Javert, to accept a new system of justice means to submit his own authority to a new authority—a path that Javert continues to find horrifying.

But Javert takes the other path instead. He goes to the Place du Chatelet and sits down inside a police station-house. He writes a series of recommendations for the police force based on his experience: that prisoners should be able to have a chair, that they shouldn't have to pay two sous to the "barker" who calls them to the parlor, and that gendarmes should never repeat what they hear in the interrogation room, for instance. He leaves the letter on the table, addressed to the administration, and returns to the quay, leaning over the rapids of the Seine.

All of these recommendations sound like they're coming out of Victor Hugo's mouth rather than Javert's. They are suggestions based on a system of mercy rather than condemnation, proposing that a system of true legal justice would give the opportunity to those condemned by society to rehabilitate themselves, or at least to be treated as true human beings.

Javert gazes into the black foamy water. All at once, he takes off his hat, places it on the quay's edge, stands up over the parapet, and jumps into the water.

In the end, Javert cannot reconcile his new worldview with the identity he's always held, and so the only answer he finds is annihilating this identity altogether.

VOLUME 5, BOOK 5: GRANDSON AND GRANDFATHER

Chapter 1 Some time after this, Boulatruelle (the convict from Montfermeil who had attempted to follow Valjean into the forest) has taken up a job as a road-mender, largely abandoning his thefts. One morning he's on his way to work and catches sight of a familiar-looking man between the trees. Boulatruelle thinks of the treasure and vows to find the man. He pursues him into the forest but then loses him. He climbs up a beech tree to see better.

We return to Montfermeil and to Boulatruelle after a long absence, and now it's suggested that even someone like Boulatruelle might be able to rehabilitate himself and his way of life. Of course, a path towards redemption is full of temptations, and Boulatruelle is just as susceptible to them as anyone.

Boulatruelle sees the man enter an open glade and approach a chestnut tree with a sheet of zinc nailed onto the bark. He jumps gaily down from the tree and zigzags through the underbrush, flailing among the nettles and hawthorns. Finally Boulatruelle reaches the tree, which now has a pick-axe left in front of it and an empty hole. He cries "Thief!" into the horizon.

This comic scene provides a bit of respite from the earlier, dramatic sections of the book, as we see how difficult it is for Boulatruelle to relinquish his sense that the money he's spent so much time searching for is actually his by right, and the unknown man is the true thief.

Chapter 2 Marius remains in a fever for many weeks, with his grandfather seated at his side. Every day a well-dressed man with white hair inquires after him and leaves a package of lint for his bandages. In September Marius's convalescence begins, and only two months later can he emerge from bed. Six months after the riots, however, France has largely forgotten the actors, and he's no longer pursued.

This well-dressed man with white hair might not be known to the servants who open Gillenormand's door, but it's clear to us that it's Valjean, whose hatred for Marius continues to coexist with a desire for him to recover—a desire linked only to Valjean's love for Cosette.

When the doctor announces that Marius will recover, Gillenormand grows delirious with joy. Before, he had never really believed in God, but now he prays and cries "Long live the Republic!" Meanwhile, Marius continues to think about Cosette, the only fixed point in his life. His grandfather's solicitude hasn't entirely won him over—he believes that as soon as he mentions Cosette, Gillenormand's true character will be unmasked again. He thinks again of his grandfather's harshness towards his father. Gillenormand does notice that Marius hasn't called him "father" since being restored to health. One morning he complains about the Convention based on a newspaper article, and Marius says firmly that the men of '93 were giants. Gillenormand remains silent.

Gillenormand's love for Marius provokes a somewhat sudden shift in values and beliefs, and he seems to embrace both God and republicanism upon learning of Marius's recovery. Marius continues to be suspicious of his grandfather, whose last words to him had been a merry suggestion that he make Cosette his mistress. Marius may not notice, but it appears that at least for Gillenormand, politics has grown far less important than his relationship to his grandson, as evidenced by the fact that he stays silent rather than arguing and defending royalism.

Chapter 3 One day, Gillenormand suggests that Marius begin to eat meat to regain his strength. Marius takes the opportunity to sit up and say that he has something to say: he wishes to marry. His grandfather agrees and laughs merrily, while Marius, stunned, trembles. Gillenormand says that the girl has spent her time weeping and waiting for him. The girl is charming and discreet, Gillenormand says, and if Marius had died she would have as well. He's realized Marius does not love him, and now he wants only for Marius to marry and be happy. Gillenormand bursts into tears, and Marius addresses him as Father, shocking his grandfather. He asks if he might see Cosette that day, and Gillenormand agrees.

Marius is still convinced that Gillenormand will remain just as stubborn and entrenched in his old ways as ever. While Marius has remained his stubborn, idealistic self, it's Gillenormand whose very nature has been transformed as a result of his love for Marius. Now Gillenormand says he accepts that Marius doesn't love him, though it's clear that he feels less stoically about this coldness than he lets on, as this final reconciliation reveals.

Chapter 4 Cosette arrives at Marius's room, delighted and afraid, followed by Jean Valjean. The porter cannot recognize in this man the haggard, muddy figure that had arrived on June 7th carrying Marius, but he still feels that he's seen Valjean's face before. Gillenormand asks Valjean for Cosette's hand on behalf of Marius, and Valjean bows. Cosette tells Marius how afraid she was for him. Then they pause and Gillenormand tells the rest of the room to speak loudly so that the couple may speak in confidence.

While Gillenormand is now delighted to bring Marius and Cosette together, Valjean cannot feel such joy, though he knows that his entire drawn-out rescue of Marius intended this best-case scenario all along. For the first time, Cosette and Marius meet not hidden in the overgrown garden on the Rue Plumet, but with their families.

Gillenormand exclaims that Cosette is beautiful, but then he turns gloomy, and says that much of his wealth is tied up in an annuity, meaning that they won't have much to live on after he dies. Valjean says that "Euphrasie Fauchelevent" possesses 600,000 francs, and opens the package on the table. The grandfather exclaims that young Marius has stumbled upon a "studentess" who's actually a millionaire. Meanwhile Marius and Cosette gaze at each other, unaware of all this.

Euphrasie had been the original name Fantine gave to Cosette, though we haven't heard it spoken before now. By retaining the name Fauchelevent, Valjean continues to conceal one aspect of Cosette's past. We've seen these 600,000 francs before, as the approximate amount of the mayor Madeleine's hidden fortune.

Chapter 5 The narrator assumes the reader has gathered how Valjean had been able to bury the sum previously deposited at Laffitte's in the forest of Montfermeil, together with the Bishop's **candlesticks**. He's returned each time he needed money. Now he keeps only 500 francs for himself. He knows he's free from Javert; he saw in the newspaper that the police inspector was found drowned, in a probable case of mental illness and suicide.

The mystery of Boulatruelle and the hidden treasure is now resolved, and it becomes clear that Valjean has only retained his wealth in order to bestow it upon Cosette, the person he loves most. It's ironic that Javert's revelation, in which he finally grasped the truth of real justice, is considered in society as "mental illness."

Chapter 6 Valjean and Gillenormand prepare the wedding. Valjean concocts a whole deceased family for Cosette, in which he is her uncle. She's declared an orphan, with Valjean (as Fauchelevent) her guardian. They deposit a legacy supposedly given to her by a dead person who had wished to remain anonymous. Cosette is slightly saddened by the realization that Valjean is not her true father, but she's already so joyful that it matters less than it might have otherwise, and she continues to call him father.

While Valjean had been ready to give up his disguises and yield to Javert not much earlier, he now is careful to resume his concealment, though for Cosette's sake rather than for his own. Cosette, once again, is portrayed as somewhat simple but also consistently loving towards both Valjean and Marius.

Gillenormand is more excited than anyone about the wedding, but claims that the 18th century knew better how to organize such events, with its manners, music, luxury, and gaiety. Today people are too serious, he says, expounding upon the older days as Cosette and Marius stop listening and gaze only at each other. Aunt Gillenormand has lived these past few months in a state of shock, but now she regains her piety and begins to spend much time at church, mumbling her rosary. She's hurt by her father's failure to consult her about the marriage, but ultimately decides to leave her inheritance to the young people. It's decided that they will live with Gillenormand.

Gillenormand is described somewhat sympathetically in his newly gained enthusiasm for his grandson's decision to marry, but he's still rather ridiculous, and his rambling monologues serve as a comic counterpoint to the romantic silences between Cosette and Marius. Aunt Gillenormand has not experience anything close to the kind of political and personal transformation undergone by her father, but even she looks kindly on the couple.

Chapter 7 Cosette and Marius see each other every day, accompanied by Fauchelevent/Valjean. Marius doesn't entirely understand the man, and he asks himself whether he might have seen him in the barricade. Marius is haunted by the thoughts of his friends, all dead. It's difficult for him to believe that he's now rich, has a family, and will marry Cosette—nothing he could have expected. Only once does Marius ask Fauchelevent, if he's acquainted with the Rue de la Chanvrerie, and Fauchelevent replies that he has no idea where that is. Marius decides that he must have been hallucinating.

Marius had been carried through the sewers and had been deposited at his grandfather's home in a state of near death, which further complicates the matter of sorting out the different identities and guises that he's seen "Fauchelevent" take on. His love for Cosette is such that he doesn't have too much time to probe these matters more deeply, so Valjean's secrets can remain still undiscovered for a while.

Chapter 8 Marius makes all the attempts he can to find two men: Thenardier and the unknown man who had brought him back to Gillenormand. But Madame Thenardier had died in prison, and no one can find a trace of the husband or his daughter Azelma. For the other man, Marius finds the coachman who had brought him to the Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire on June 6th, who declares that on that afternoon, he had stood at the command of a police-agent (Javert) on the quai; around nine o'clock that evening, a man had emerged from the sewer grating bearing another who appeared to be dead. The agent had first brought the two men into the carriage and then to the Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire, where they had deposited the dead man (Marius). Then the police agent had led the other man away into the dark.

Rather than attempting to resolve the murky familiarity of Fauchelevent, Marius turns to two mysteries that seem more vital to him. He obviously doesn't know that he'd met Thenardier in the sewers, though Thenardier had believed him to be already dead. By tracking down the coachman, Marius learns that there must have been some connection between Javert—or the police force in general—and the person who saved him. Finding this person and Thenardier will allow Marius, he believes, to repay both his own debts and those of his father.

Marius wants to find the savior who had led him through the sewer. He asks the police, but no one has any report of an arrest made on June 6th, and they say that the coachman must have made the affair up. Marius wonders what has become of this agent. One day, speaking with Valjean and Cosette, he exclaims how sublime this man must have been, to have traveled more than a league in the terrifying underground chambers with the sole object of saving himself, risking his own life twenty times, whereas he, Marius, was only an insurgent. He would give all Cosette's 600,000 francs to know who this man was. Valjean remains silent.

The reader is of course far better acquainted with this mystery than is Marius, who seems to have reached a dead end, given that his savior appears not to have been arrested, despite having supposedly been accompanied by a police agent through the night. It's somewhat frustrating, then, to see Valjean refuse to clarify the mystery, though it makes sense as part of his general reluctance to admit heroism or glory.

VOLUME 5, BOOK 6: THE SLEEPLESS NIGHT

Chapter 1 February 16th, 1833, is the wedding night. The ceremony takes place in Gillenormand's house on Shrove Tuesday (the day before Lent begins). The prior evening, Valjean gives the 600,000 francs to Marius, and a chamber in the Gillenormand house is set up for him. A few days before the marriage, Valjean had accidentally crushed his right thumb, but he hadn't made a fuss about it, only carrying his arm in the sling. He cannot therefore sign the document, and Gillenormand does so instead.

This description of the wedding is concerned less with the love between Cosette and Marius than with the practical matters of an income, signed documents, and the like—all of which reflect the historical moment of marriage in 1832, when dowries and practical incomes were hugely important in terms of determining marriages.

At this time, the Rue Saint-Louis (between the Gillenormand house and the Saint-Paul church) is barred off for renovations, so the guests have to turn through the boulevard, where the Shrove Tuesday celebrations are taking place. The sidewalks overflow with pedestrians and children in disguise. A wagon full of masked people passes by the wedding carriage—a tradition stretching back to the earliest days of the monarchy, which the narrator disapproves of as buffoonery that provokes a crowd. One masker, a young girl disguised as a fishwife, remarks to her father (disguised as a Spaniard) that she's sure she knows the man with his arm in the sling in the wedding carriage. The Spaniard tells his daughter to go follow the wedding cart, but she says that she's hired—she'll be arrested if she leaves the cart. Tomorrow, the father says, he must sneak back into his hole, but she is free—she must find out where the wedding-party went, and where the pair lives. He tells her she must try—and calls her Azelma.

Shrove Tuesday is better known to an American audience as Mardi Gras, a day of festivals and cheer before the beginning of Lent, a time of the year when Christians fast and give up revelry. A devout Christian himself, Hugo still ties this pre-Lenten revelry to the darker disguises that can be taken up by criminals and others in Paris. Once again, various threads of characters and plot points of the novel intersect, as Azelma and Thenardier reappear in another disguise (underlining the narrator's point about the connections between disguise, merry-making, and crime). It's suggested that Thenardier has recently been living in hiding, only able to sneak out of the darkness (material and moral) occasionally.

Chapter 2 Cosette and Marius both look young and lustrous, though Marius's scars are still visible. Gillenormand confides to Fauchelevent that he is only interested in joy rather than sadness now—his political opinions are no more. As Cosette and Marius say their vows, their torments seem to come back to them, now converted into **light**—their suffering redeemed. They return home to a wedding party and begin to eat dinner. At one point, Gillenormand realizes that Fauchelevent is no longer there. Basque says his injured hand was paining him, and that he'd asked to be excused until tomorrow.

Although everyone in Paris seems to have forgotten about the barricades and the June insurrection, the narrator notes that this history continues to remain present in the form of scars on Marius's face—reminders of his suffering and the loss of his friends, but also of his rehabilitation and recovery, and his newfound happiness with Cosette that is linked in the novel to the moral health of light.

After dessert, Gillenormand makes a toast, saying that they should be happy, and then delivers a winding speech about joy and goodness and love. He asks them to receive his blessing. A little after midnight, all have left, and the narrator notes that **ligh**t shines on such houses on wedding nights, for God can be found in the joys of true marriage and love.

Although Gillenormand is employed here in his comic function, the points he makes about the relationship of goodness and love is further emphasized by Hugo, who considers marriage the true consummation of love, and therefore something to be promoted.

Chapter 3 Earlier, Valjean had gone up to the antechamber, where he'd arrived with Marius eight months before. He returned to the Rue de l'homme Armé, his former home, now empty. He went to a valise by his bed and opened it with a key. He drew out Cosette's clothing from Montfermeil a decade earlier, laid it on the bed and called up memories: the moment he saw her shivering, carrying water, and the forest they crossed together, hand in hand. His head dropped and he began to sob.

Here Valjean recalls the entire trajectory of his recent past, in which he'd thought he had been born again (after faking his death) and given a new chance in life—to find love not in marriage, but in taking on the role of a father. Unlike marriage, this kind of love has an endpoint, he is now realizing, especially given Valjean's own past.

Chapter 4 The narrator stresses how many times we've seen Valjean struggle against his conscience, beg for mercy, and resist **darkness**. He feels he is now passing through a final combat between good and evil. He had enabled Cosette's and Marius's happiness. But should he now keep Cosette as much as he can, living with them and bringing his convict's past into their future? He is caught between egotism and his duty, struggling between sacrificing Cosette or himself. He remains at his bed until daylight, bent over it, motionless. All at once he shudders and kisses Cosette's clothes—seen only by God.

Once again we witness Valjean at a moral crossroads, balanced between his own desires (even though these desires also include Cosette's feelings, as she loves Valjean too), his sense that despite all his efforts, he has not been fully redeemed, and the reality that his past as a convict will continue to affect both his future and that of Cosette and Marius. The narrator stresses once again how thorny the path towards redemption can be.

VOLUME 5, BOOK 7: THE LAST DRAUGHT FROM THE CUP

Chapter 1 On February 17th, Basque opens the door to see Fauchelevent, who asks for the Baron (Marius's new title, the title of his father). He asks that Basque not mention his name—he wants it to be a surprise. Valjean waits in the drawing room, which is still in disorder from the wedding party. Marius is delighted to see Fauchelevent, and tells him to stay in his chamber here. They'll all live together, he says.

Following Valjean's excruciating internal conflict between his desires and his conscience, we're now thrust back into an entirely different atmosphere, in which Marius is still almost giddy at his newfound happiness and love for his new wife.

Valjean interrupts Marius and says he must tell him something: he is an ex-convict. There is nothing the matter with his hand, he says, untying the bandage: he did not want to commit forgery by signing the wrong name to the marriage document. Marius stammers a response, and Valjean calmly states that he was in the galleys for 19 years for theft, then condemned to life for a second offense. Marius retreats in horror, and Valjean, speaking slowly, tells him to believe he is not Cosette's father but a peasant of Faverolles, whose name is Jean Valjean. Marius looks at him and recognizes his icy sincerity. He says he believes him.

Valjean makes no attempt to soften the blow—once he has decided to reveal his past and undo his disguise, he sees no way of easing the pain of this revelation. And yet Valjean does not reveal the entire truth at this moment either. He doesn't talk about his status as benevolent mayor of M.-sur-M., or his reputation as the poor man who gives alms, but instead he focuses solely on his guilt and responsibility as a twice-sentenced ex-convict.

Valjean tells Marius that Cosette was an orphan, and she needed him. He fulfilled this duty while he could, but now she is "Madame Pontmercy," and he has only to make the 600,000-franc restitution and acquaint Marius with who he really is. Marius is stupefied and asks Valjean why he hasn't kept this secret, since he apparently is not being pursued—there must be another motive. Valjean slowly answers that it's a strange motive, one of honesty. It was tempting to embrace this new family and live with the married couple, but he belongs to no family, not even this one. He is left outside, and when he gave Cosette in marriage, all inklings of family ended. He could lie when it was for her, but now that it would be for himself, he cannot. Everything would have been arranged, and no one hurt, if he'd kept the name Fauchelevent (one given to him by Fauchelevent himself out of gratitude)—except his own soul.

It's interesting that one of Marius's first reactions is one of surprise—surprise that Valjean hasn't taken the opportunity to conceal his past for as long as he could. Doing this would mean a morality system according to which what is unknown cannot be judged. But a system of justice that includes God's will has to take into account the existence of an all-knowing being, one from whom nothing can be concealed. Having accepted this worldview, Valjean can only choose honesty as the morally justifiable option. Valjean also explains how he's justified his various concealments and lies over the past few years as benefiting Cosette, not only himself.

Valjean says that there is a silence that lies, a kind of cowardice and treason that would have made their entire existence a lie. He is pursued and denounced, he says—by himself. And now that Marius despises him, he can respect himself as an honest man. He pauses, then says that it is dishonest to take another's name. While he once stole a loaf of bread to live, today, in order to live, he will not steal a name. Both men are silent. Valjean then asks Marius to imagine if he might continue to conceal his identity, and then one day at the theater a policeman might shout "Jean Valjean," and his mask would be torn off.

Valjean develops an interesting perspective on the justifiability of lies and silence, distinguishing lies that are in the service of others (think of Sister Simplice's lie to Javert) and ones that are allied instead to selfishness and cowardice. Subsequently, Valjean adds a pragmatic element to his desire to explain himself, suggesting that Cosette and Marius will never truly be free with the threat of Valjean's discovery still alive.

Marius says he will ask his grandfather's friends to attain Valjean's pardon, but Valjean says he is supposed to be dead. The only pardon he needs is that of conscience. At that moment, Cosette enters, saying that they must be talking of politics. She prattles on happily, and Marius asks her to leave, as they're discussing business, but she says she won't be bored. She asks her father to kiss her, and he does so, looking pale. She sits down and announces that she'll stay. Marius gravely says that it's impossible, and finally she marches out of the room.

Valjean distinguishes official forgiveness, "pardon," from what he considers to be true forgiveness, or freedom from the burden of conscience. As Cosette enters, her carefree, cheerful attitude contrasts with the grave, somber discussion between Marius and Valjean, and also constitutes a reminder of the blissful happiness that Valjean is hoping to maintain for Cosette by sacrificing himself.

When the door is shut, Marius shakes his head, saying "Poor Cosette, when she finds out…" Valjean trembles and says he hadn't thought that he would tell Cosette. He begins to sob. Marius reassures him that he'll keep his secret. Valjean asks if Marius thinks he should see Cosette any more. Marius answers that it would be better not to. Valjean murmurs agreement, and turns to go. Suddenly, he turns around, livid, and says all he wants is to go to see her—this is why he's confessed all. If Marius permits it, he'll come every so often, as rarely as Marius pleases, at night, perhaps, to be safer. Marius says he may come every evening.

This back-and-forth shows how both Marius and Valjean struggle between their own desires and wanting to sacrifice something for the greater good. Marius is thunderstruck by Valjean's confession, but at the last moment seems to take pity on him by allowing Valjean to continue to visit Cosette, while Valjean can't help but cling to this, the last piece of happiness left in his life.

Chapter 2 Marius struggles to accept this new knowledge, and wonders if he hasn't been imprudent. He admits to himself that he never even mentioned the Gorbeau hovel affair to Cosette, nor made any inquiries about the family: he'd only had time for love. He wonders if it would have changed anything had he discovered Valjean was a convict, and he realizes he wouldn't have loved her any less. Still, Valjean revealed his situation to him, which nothing forced him to do, so his conscience may well be awakening. As Fauchelevent, Marius had distrusted him, but as Valjean, he now seems sincere.

As Marius mentally traverses the mysteries that he'd pushed aside, he has to acknowledge that a number of elements about Cosette's family life never added up, and that love, in this case, ended up being an accomplice to Valjean's concealment. Marius begins to contemplate Valjean's decisions, attempting to judge him with as much fairness as he can muster, as he decides whether or not Valjean deserves forgiveness.

Then Marius asks himself why Valjean came to the barricade, and he recalls Valjean dragging Javert down the street, as well as the pistol shot. Marius asks himself how it was that crime and innocence, in the form of Valjean and Cosette, could have coexisted for so long—the monster shadowing the angel. Marius realizes how little man can know of God's tools and means. But he continues to return to what he knows: Valjean is a convict, the lowest rung of the social ladder. Marius has not yet questioned this ladder, and so Valjean appears repulsive to him. Marius had not dared to ask him further, probing questions, because he was afraid that this darkness would cast a shadow onto his life with Cosette. So now he shuts his eyes to Valjean. Meanwhile, though, he begins to ask Cosette more about her childhood, and learns that by all accounts, Valjean was nothing but good to her.

We're asked to recall the scene at the barricades, where the narration allows a gulf of dramatic irony to open up between what Marius assumes (that Valjean killed Javert) and what the reader knows. Marius is not entirely convinced that he should condemn Valjean, especially given other signs of the man's goodness to Cosette and others. But he—like Cosette when she shuddered at the sight of the convicts marching to the galleys—is a "regular" member of society in that he assumes convicts are in prison for a reason, are there justly, and should be socially condemned as a result.

VOLUME 5, BOOK 8: FADING AWAY OF THE TWILIGHT

Chapter 1 The next day, Valjean arrives at Gillenormand's and waits in the antechamber on the ground floor. Basque accompanies Cosette to meet him, and Cosette remarks at how odd it is that he wants to meet down here. She invites him to dine, but Valjean says he cannot. He addresses her as "Madame" and tells her to call him "Monsieur Jean" or "Jean." She asks what this means, and begs him to be nice and come to live with them. Valjean says that with a husband, she has no more need of a father.

Cosette, as usual, isn't given as much complexity as the male characters in the story. Instead, we're meant to see the contrast between her bubbly happiness and Valjean's seriousness as the first sign of a tragic gulf that is about to open up between them. It is a gulf that Valjean himself prompts, knowing that he must slowly distance himself from Cosette to "free" her.

Cosette exclaims that recently she can't understand either Marius or Valjean. She asks if he's angry at her because she is happy. It is a simple question, but Valjean turns pale. He tells her that his sole desire is for her to be happy, and he addresses her with the informal "you," so that she hugs him in happiness. Valjean quickly switches back to the formal "you," saying that Marius should forgive him, before leaving.

Valjean momentarily slips in his attempt to turn his relationship to Cosette increasingly formal (and thus release himself, and the aura of guilt and condemnation around him, from any relation to her), because her guess is precisely the opposite of what he hopes for her.

Chapter 2 The next day Valjean returns, and Cosette no longer questions these changes, though she seems slightly diminished. In the coming days, the household gets used to the new norms. Marius always arranges to be absent when Valjean is there. Cosette begins to settle into married life, and begins to grow more detached from Valjean. One day, however, she says "father" to him. He tells her to say "Jean," which she does, laughing. She fails to see him wipe his eyes.

It appears that Valjean's strategy is working, as Cosette grows used to a newly formalized relationship to her adopted father, even as she continues to think of him fondly. Marius wants to have compassion for Valjean, but his natural tendency towards condemning the ex-convict is such that he can't bring himself to be friendly to him.

Chapter 3 After this last time, Cosette never again calls Valjean "father." His only joy, however, continues to be in the hour he sees her each day. One April afternoon, Marius suggests to Cosette that they return to the Rue Plumet garden. That evening, they are still gone when Valjean arrives. He waits but eventually departs, his head down. The next day, he asks Cosette how they reached the garden, and she says on foot and in a hackney carriage. Valjean, who has noticed how frugal the couple is, suggests that Cosette buy a carriage of her own or hire another maid. She doesn't answer.

The Rue Plumet garden was where the love affair between Cosette and Marius began. It recalls the time during their relationship when their love had little to do with their families, and when, for Marius, the ominousness of Valjean's confession had not yet colored their marriage. Marius may be purposefully distancing himself even more from Valjean, but in Cosette's case she is meant to be seen merely as thoughtless, an already mentioned side effect of love.

One day, Cosette tells Valjean that Marius had said something odd to her: whether she'd be brave enough to live on only the 3,000-livre income of his family, rather than the 27,000 of hers. Valjean only listens in gloomy silence. He begins to realize that Marius suspects the money comes from a corrupt source. The next day, the two habitual armchairs are gone. Valjean, having understood Marius's intimations, doesn't return the next day. Cosette exclaims at this, but Marius soon distracts her. She sends a servant to Valjean's home, asking if he was ill. He says that he is simply beginning to travel again.

To Valjean, it now appears that all the efforts he's made to ensure that Cosette will live comfortably and untainted by his own past are beginning to unravel—and as a direct result of his confession to Marius. Marius clearly is beginning to doubt his agreement that Valjean could visit Cosette each day, though he refuses to see Valjean and explain his attitude to him explicitly. Valjean, feeling guilty and unredeemed, doesn't question Marius.

Chapter 4 Throughout the spring of 1833, passersby in the Marais begin to notice an old man dressed in black traveling from the Rue de l'Homme Armé to the Rue Saint-Louis each day at the same hour. Each time, he reaches the Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire, pauses, and gazes into the street with a tragic air. A tear falls down his cheek, and he returns home. Little by little, he completes less and less of the journey. Sometimes, children follow him and laugh.

Once again, the narrator zooms out to describe a particular Parisian neighborhood, here creating a small map that conforms to the real, historical Paris, though in this case populated by the literary figure of Valjean, now fully condemned not only by Marius but also by society at large.

VOLUME 5, BOOK 9: SUPREME SHADOW, SUPREME DAWN

Chapter 1 The narrator cautions the reader not to blame Marius, who has done what he thought just. He decides not to spend any of the 600,000 francs before learning their origin. Cosette, meanwhile, remains at heart attached to Valjean. She sometimes exclaims at his long absence to Marius, but she loves her husband even more, and allows him to draw her away from Valjean, as is normal for youth against old age.

Even after describing Valjean's misery, the narrator suggests that it is difficult to know exactly what justice entails, so Marius, just like Valjean himself, should not be condemned. It's once again suggested that love can actually, in many cases, lead to a kind of thoughtlessness.

Chapter 2 One day, Valjean returns from his short walk, and doesn't leave his apartment the next day. Then he doesn't leave his bed. The porter asks him to eat something, but he fails to. She tells her husband that it's a shame; he's a kind old man. She calls a doctor and sends him to Valjean. When he departs, he tells the porter that the man seems to have lost someone dear to him. People may die of that; as well as the porter's visits, someone else must come.

Here, amid a general lack of care or compassion for a forgotten old man, the porter does show some of these qualities by attempting to check up on Valjean. As often happens in the novel, moral or emotional ailments get mapped onto and reflected by physical ailments, and vice versa, as is shown by Valjean's illness.

Chapter 3 One evening, Valjean gains the strength to sit up in bed, fetch the valise, and spread Cosette's small outfit out on the bed. He catches sight of himself in the mirror and doesn't recognize his reflection. He's 80, and looks it; he would have looked 50 several months before. He has a fainting fit, and when he regains consciousness he begins painfully to compose a letter. He writes to Cosette that her husband was right to make him understand that he ought to go away, but that Marius had committed a slight error. He explains his invention of making wax cheaply so as to imitate expensive jet—the source of his fortune. He puts down his pen and exclaims how frightful it would be to die without seeing her. At that moment there's a knock at the door.

Just as he'd done before in making his confession to Marius, Valjean reminds himself of the path he's tread with Cosette—a path that had brought him the only happiness he's known, but also one that seemed to suggest progress towards a redemption which now has proved illusory. Still, before dying, Valjean's main thoughts have to deal with how to ensure that Marius doesn't throw away the money that Valjean has safely stashed away for Cosette, even if it means he has to reveal one more element of his past.

Chapter 4 That evening, Marius is leaving the table when Basque hands him a letter from someone in the antechamber. The letter smells of tobacco and the handwriting recalls the Jondrette garret to Marius. Struck by the fateful coincidence, he breaks the seal and reads that the writer has a secret about an individual that concerns him, and he will tell Marius why he must drive out a criminal individual from his household. The letter is signed "Thenard." Marius tells Basque to bring him in, but the man is a stranger, and wears a coat that had not been made for him.

The letter might recall to us the various letters written by Thenardier and dispatched to Eponine and Azelma, asking in sanctimonious tones for donations from any wealthy man in Paris whom he could find. By now, we can probably suspect that even if the man looks like a stranger, this is probably one more disguise out of many, as Thenardier is adept at such ruses.

The narrator makes a slight digression: at this time, there is a man who lives near the Arsenal who specializes in changing villains into honest men (for a brief period), through a costume that renders the wearer respectable-looking. It's one of these suits that the visitor is wearing. Marius asks what the man wants, and he says he believes he saw the Baron at several fashionable dinner parties. He says he'd like to go and establish himself in America. He'll begin his secret for free: there is a thief and assassin living in his home, whose name is Jean Valjean—an ex-convict. Marius says coldly that he knows it.

Not only does Thenardier (we assume) adopt a "respectable-looking" costume, but he also takes on the disguise of another character, suggesting that he and Marius come from the same social circle. However, the man pretty quickly abandons this ruse to reveal the real reason he's come to see Marius, tempting him with a "free" part of his secret so as to wrangle more money out of him.

The stranger grows incensed, and finally says he will sell the secret about Valjean's fortune. But Marius says he knows this as well. He calls the man "Thenardier." He says the man is also known under a number of names, and once kept an inn at Montfermeil. Thenardier denies it, and Marius says he is a rascal. He flings a 500-franc note at Thenardier, who, surprised, finally takes off his coat, adjusts his accent, and looks at Marius for the first time—without recognizing him, as he'd never seen him before.

It's easy to forget that while Marius is familiar with Thenardier by name and face (initially by gazing through the peephole that separated their garrets), the latter has never really met Marius. In the sewers he was mainly concerned with getting money out of Valjean, and not paying attention to the supposedly dead Marius.

Thenardier had slowly grasped a good deal of information, guessing who the man in the sewers had been, finding out his name and that Madame Pontmercy was really Cosette. Marius says that he'll reveal the other "secrets." In 1822, a man named M. Madeleine made the fortune of a whole city and had founded hospitals, opened schools, and done good throughout the town. After being elected mayor, a secret from his past was revealed by a liberated convict, who denounced him and had him arrested. This convict, Valjean, slipped away to Paris and, through a false signature, robbed Madeleine of over half a million francs. In addition, Valjean killed the police inspector Javert — Marius witnessed it.

Marius's story is somewhat confusing to the reader, who knows that some of it is true, some exaggerated, and some wholly fabricated, so we are forced to sort out which is which. The ways in which such rumors travel seems to mimic the way riots and revolt spread around Paris, according to the narrator. Marius's version of the story helps to explain why he continues to condemn Valjean even while assuming that he's learned all about the man, having made his own investigations into Valjean's past.

Thenardier glares at Marius as though a conquered man, but then smiles. He says that they're on the wrong track. First, Valjean didn't rob Madeleine—they are the same person. Second, Javert himself killed Javert. He draws several newspapers, yellow and faded, from his pockets. One, from 1823, establishes the identity of Madeleine and Valjean; another, from June 1832, announces the suicide o Javert. Suddenly, Valjean grows grand in Marius's eyes, and he cries out with joy, saying he's a hero.

Between Marius's and Thenardier's partial truths, Marius begins to be able to piece together what really happened. Thenardier's true claim that Madeleine is Valjean clears him of that crime in Marius's eyes, and the suicide of Javert, in turn, clears Valjean of another crime—one which Marius, of course, didn't actually "witness."

But Thenardier exclaims that Valjean is, in fact, an assassin and thief. Marius grows distraught once again, as Thenardier makes himself comfortable. On June 6, 1832, he says, a man was in the Grand Sewer of Paris to conceal himself, possessing a key to the entrance. The man heard a noise in the sewer, and saw another man, an ex-convict, dragging a corpse on his shoulder. The ex-convict, a strong, burly man, had demanded the key, and the first man found himself forced to open the entrance for him. However, this man tore off some of the assassinated man's coat so that he could trace him later on. Thenardier now takes out a strip of cloth from his pocket. Marius springs to his feet, staring at the fragment. He fumbles through a cupboard by his side, takes out an old black coat covered with blood, and places the strip perfectly to complete the coat. Thenardier is petrified.

Finally, the mystery that Marius has been attempting to solve is illuminated—and through the words of the man whom Marius has been hunting down for months. Thenardier's partial knowledge fills in the gaps of what Marius already knows. With the ripped-off piece of cloth serving as Marius's evidence (shocking Thenardier, who had thought it was evidence for himself), Marius has enacted a kind of citizen's trial, and now fully understands his error in condemning Valjean, and the injustice of Valjean's status in his family as well as in society.

Marius begins to shout that Thenardier is a liar and villain—he wanted to ruin Valjean but only glorified him. Marius flings 1,000 francs at Thenardier and tells him to get out of there. Two days later, the narrator notes, Thenardier leaves for America under a false name with his daughter Azelma. There he changes little, and becomes a slave-dealer.

By flinging money at Thenardier, Marius fulfills his vow to his father even while acknowledging Thenardier's despicable morals. That Thenardier becomes a slave-dealer underlines his status in the novel as the only unequivocally evil character.

Marius rushes out to the garden and cries to Cosette that they must call a carriage. She thinks he's gone mad, but follows him, joyful once he utters Valjean's address. Marius tells Cosette that Valjean went to the barricade to save him, and that he saved Cosette too; Marius has been monstrously ungrateful. Gavroche must have delivered his letter to Valjean, not to Cosette. Cosette doesn't understand a word of this.

Once again, Cosette is portrayed as joyful and good, but also somewhat simple-minded, unable to grasp the complexities of the relationships between her, Marius, and Valjean. Marius continues to discover his mistakes in condemning Valjean.

Chapter 5 Valjean feebly calls out that the knocker may enter. Cosette and Marius rush into the room. Valjean is overwhelmed, stammering that he thought he'd never see her again. He says that she must forgive him, then, and Marius as well. Marius cries that Valjean is asking his forgiveness, after having saved him, the ingrate, at the barricade and in the sewers. Valjean tells him to be quiet, not to tell all that. Marius says that Valjean did not tell the whole truth, but Valjean replies that Marius was in the right for sending him away. Tomorrow, Marius says, Valjean will come home; Cosette exclaims that she could not be happier for "father" to live with them.

After a flashback to explain why someone is knocking at Valjean's door, we now return to his bedside. Marius had struggled to forgive Valjean for his identity as an ex-convict, but now Marius understands that it is he *who must ask for forgiveness. Valjean, however, is still unable to fully forgive himself, believing that he deserves the condemnation of others, and that he can never be fully redeemed for his past wrongs—even though he is quick to forgive others.*

Valjean says that it would certainly be charming to live together, but it is a pity. He is going to die shortly, he says, but that is nothing—God knows what is needed better than humans do. He blesses Cosette and Marius. At that moment, the doctor enters and feels Valjean's pulse. He murmurs that it must have been Cosette and Marius that Valjean wanted, but he whispers to Marius that it is too late.

Although Marius now knows just how mistaken he was, it is as if he is still being punished for choosing judgment over mercy, and earthly justice over divine justice. However, he has at least arrived in time to accompany Valjean in his last moments, and to ask Valjean to forgive him.

Valjean rises to his feet, detaches a small crucifix from the wall, and lays it next to his bed. Cosette sobs, and cries that they have found him too soon only to lose him again. Valjean kisses Cosette's sleeve and says that what has caused him pain is that they have not touched the money that really belongs to them, and he again explains the industrial process he invented. The porter slips upstairs and asks if Valjean would like a priest, but Valjean says he's had one. He points above his head, and the narrator notes that the Bishop may well have been present.

At the moments before his death, all Valjean can think about is how to ensure that Cosette will live comfortably after he's gone. This leads him to try to convince Marius that the funds are unblemished. By naming the Bishop, the narrator suggests that Valjean has come full circle from his initial moment of transformation and redemption.

Valjean's breath grows intermittent, and he beckons to Cosette and to Marius, exclaiming how good it is to die like this, surrounding by love and family. He points to the **candlesticks** on the chimney, hoping that the person who gave them to him is pleased with what he could do. He asks Cosette if she remembers Montfermeil, the first time he touched her hand, and the doll that he gave her. He asks her to forgive the Thenardiers, who were wicked, and he tells her the name of her mother, Fantine, and asks her to remember that name. He tells her to come nearer, and that he is about to die happy. Cosette grasps his hand. Valjean looks skyward, and dies.

For Valjean, the Bishop's candlesticks have remained a symbol of his former life, but also of his commitment to changing himself and his life. Together with his love for Cosette, they are some of the last things he thinks about before dying. In this dramatic final scene, Valjean's claim that he is dying happy suggests that it is only at the moment of his death that he feels truly redeemed for all he has done in his past, or at least hopes he can be forgiven.

Chapter 6 The narrator takes us to the Père-Lachaise cemetery, where, in a deserted corner, where few people travel, lies a plain stone. No name is to be read there, but someone long ago had written a few lines of French verse in pencil, beginning "He sleeps. Although his fate was very strange, he lived" and ending, "as the night comes when day is gone."

By placing Valjean's grave in an unknown corner of the cemetery, Hugo suggests that greatness is found not in historical glory but also in the small lives and experiences of ordinary people, even if they are to be forgotten by society at large.

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