

# MASTERPIECE

**The greatest novel. The greatest adaptation.**

## ***Les Misérables***

**Dominic West, David Oyelowo and Lily Collins  
star in Victor Hugo's epic tale, scripted by Andrew Davies  
on MASTERPIECE**

**Sundays, April 14 - May 19, 2019 on PBS**

A blockbuster novel for over 150 years comes vividly to life in award-winning screenwriter Andrew Davies' multi-layered retelling of *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo. This enthralling television event (*not* a musical) airs in six episodes on MASTERPIECE, Sundays, April 14 - May 19, 2019 on PBS.

Dominic West (*The Affair*, *The Wire*) stars as Jean Valjean, the most famous fugitive in literature, with David Oyelowo (*Selma*, *Small Island*) as his relentless pursuer, Javert. Lily Collins (*Rules Don't Apply*; *Love, Rosie*) appears as the tragic seamstress, Fantine; Ellie Bamber (*Nocturnal Animals*) plays her adolescent daughter, Cosette; Olivia Colman (*The Favourite*) and Adeel Akhtar (*Unforgotten*) are Cosette's cruel overseers, the Thénardiens; and Josh O'Connor (*The Durrells in Corfu*) is the student and reluctant revolutionary Marius, who falls in love with Cosette at first sight.

Joining the extensive cast are David Bradley (*Game of Thrones*, *Harry Potter*) as Marius' formidable grandfather, Monsieur Gillenormand, Henry Lloyd-Hughes (*Indian Summers*) as Marius' war-hero father, Pontmercy, and Derek Jacobi (*Gladiator*, *Last Tango in Halifax*) as the kindly Bishop of Digne, who rescues Valjean at his lowest ebb.

One of the longest and most engaging novels ever written, with a plot that is as relevant today as in the socially tumultuous 19<sup>th</sup> century, *Les Misérables* is a challenging story to condense. But in a triumph of scripting, MASTERPIECE veteran screenwriter Davies (*Pride & Prejudice*, *Bleak House* and more than a dozen other productions) preserves Hugo's intricate plotting, striking historical vignettes, powerful themes, and evocative characterizations, producing an epic television experience that is worthy of the original novel.

*Les Misérables* opens after the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, which saw Napoleon's final defeat by the English and their allies, a quarter of a century after the French Revolution. With Napoleon's downfall, the French monarchy is restored - and the thwarted ideals of the republic go underground.

For most of that quarter century, Valjean has been serving a sentence of hard labor for stealing a loaf of bread. On his release the same year as Waterloo, he immediately resorts to petty crime, risking re-arrest and a life sentence—a fate deemed a virtual certainty by his former jailer Javert.

After this unpromising start, Valjean begins his difficult journey to redemption. But always lurking in the background is Javert, determined to bring him to justice for breaking parole and robbing a child. Establishing himself under a new name in a provincial town, Valjean seems safe at last. He prospers as a businessman and is eventually appointed mayor. One day, he gives work to a needy young woman, Fantine, who hides the fact that she is the unwed mother of a child named Cosette. As the plot unfolds, the stories of mother and daughter become inextricably entwined with that of the fugitive.

Also tangled into the plot are Monsieur and Madame Thénardier, an abusive innkeeping couple who become Cosette's guardians. Two of the Thénardiens' children, Éponine (Erin Kellyman) and Gavroche (Reece Yates), go on to play heroic roles in the Paris Uprising of 1832, which is led by the romantic idealist Enjolras (Joseph Quinn).

The story reaches its climax during the uprising and features an iconic escape scene through the sewers of Paris, which made the underground tunnels one of the most famous engineering marvels in the world.

The first English translation of *Les Misérables* in 1862 left the French title (meaning "the wretched" or "the dispossessed") in place. And so it has been known in English ever since, through countless printed editions, plays, musicals, and movies. Writing in 2017, Princeton University scholar and translator David Bellos put Victor Hugo's masterpiece in context. "Among all the gifts France has given to Hollywood, Broadway and the common reader..., *Les Misérables* stands out as the greatest by far."

*Les Misérables* is a Lookout Point and BBC Studios production for BBC, co-produced with MASTERPIECE. The executive producers are Andrew Davies, Faith Penhale for Lookout Point, Bethan Jones for BBC Studios, Mona Qureshi for BBC One, Rebecca Eaton for MASTERPIECE, Dominic West and David Oyelowo. The producer is Chris Carey. The director is Tom Shankland. The drama was commissioned by Charlotte Moore, Director of BBC Content. Delegate producer for Czar Film and TV is Eurydice Gysel; produced with the support of Screen Flanders and Screen Brussels.

*Les Misérables* is globally distributed outside the U.S. by BBC Studios Distribution. MASTERPIECE is presented on PBS by WGBH Boston.

### About MASTERPIECE

Winner of 83 Primetime Emmys® and 16 Peabody Awards, MASTERPIECE has been essential Sunday night viewing for millions of fans since 1971. Rebecca Eaton is the executive producer of the series. Funding for MASTERPIECE is provided by Viking and Raymond James with additional support from public television viewers and contributors to The MASTERPIECE Trust. Presented on PBS by WGBH Boston, MASTERPIECE is known for recent hits such as *Sherlock*, *Downton Abbey* and *Victoria*, and beloved classics such as *Upstairs Downstairs*, *Prime Suspect*, *The Forsyte Saga* and *Poldark*.

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