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## EDITOR'S NOTE

# A Novel Approach

The morning the national Broadway tour of *Les Misérables* opened at Popejoy Hall in Albuquerque, I sat during the show's load-in with stage manager Ken Davis, who spoke of his lifelong obsession with musicals and in particular with *Les Misérables*. He told me that he's lived out of his suitcase for some 35 years — he's managed 12 or 13 nationally touring shows so far — and when I asked him where home is, he said that if it counts, he has a storage unit and a P.O. Box in Florida.

As someone who grew up reading and analyzing Victor Hugo's 1,500 pages of *Les Misérables* for school, I was also curious to learn more about how close the U.S. production is to the original novel. I couldn't not share Davis' answers with our readers, especially with those who may have seen the show this past week or will catch it this weekend.

The following is an excerpt from the interview, edited for clarity.

### How does Victor Hugo's novel play into the show, besides its characters and narrative arc?

We've got like five copies [of the book] in my office, backstage. When a new performer comes in, we give them a copy. We travel with a resident director [Brendan Stackhouse] who is rather like a dramaturge, and just this past weekend when we were going through the show with a new company member, we discussed [the book]. There's so much color and layers in the book that we obviously can't do on stage, but it's all implied.

#### Such as?

Even for the opening number, where the convicts are rowing — in the book, the convicts are coming back from an island in the Mediterranean where they have been harvesting jet, a mineral that is used to make watches. And when we get to the scene in the factory with all the ladies [and meet Fantine] ... some people on stage are actually polishing jet. So, there are these little nuggets from the book that are in there.

Like for you, for Alain [Boublil, who wrote the original French lyrics for the 1980 concept album] and Claude-Michel [Schönberg, who wrote the music], Hugo's book is part of their upbringing. And they're still very, very much involved [in the production]. ... They still get the reports every night, the show reports that I send out saying how the show was and how the performance was. It still goes to them. Obviously, it also goes to Cameron Mackintosh, our producer. The prologue [for the production] was created for the American audience and for the unfamiliar. We start with Jean Valjean as a convict and go through the whole story of him meeting the bishop. But in the book, the first 100 pages are just about the bishop.

### What other hidden references to Hugo are there?

When you walk in ... are you coming to see the show?

#### Yes. I can't wait!

So, the original production was this turntable, and that was the conceit. But now we've got projections that are actually [of] Victor Hugo's paintings.

#### He was a painter?

Yes! When you walk in, if you look at the corner [of the background], it's signed "Hugo."

### You must know the songs so well by now. Do you ever catch yourself singing along during a show?

Oh yeah. Sometimes I'm on headset and I forget to turn my microphone off. So everybody gets to hear it. They're like, "Your mic's open."

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