

# Comparison of the Characters of Jean Valjean and Javert in the Musical "Les Mis é rables"

Tianyu Liu

Qilu University of Technology (Shandong Academy of Sciences), Jinan 250000, Shandong, China

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**Abstract:** The musical "Les Mis é rables" was composed by French composer Claude Michel Schoenberg and adapted from the novel "Les Mis é rables" by the famous French writer Victor Hugo. It tells the story of the decade after the Napoleonic Wars, where the wealth gap and the number of refugees in French society increased, and the protagonist Jean Valjean constantly redeemed himself in the midst of suffering. In the play, Jean Valjean and Javert serve as the protagonists of the entire play, and their conflicts run through the entire series of stories. This article starts with the character characteristics and classic singing passages of the two male leads. By interpreting the conflicts between the two and comparing their different character characteristics, it helps people better appreciate this musical and feel its unique artistic style and profound artistic charm.

**Keywords:** Musical, Les Miserables, Character Comparison.

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## 1. An Analysis of the Characters of Jean Valjean and Javert

### 1.1. Kind and gentle Jean Valjean

Jean Valjean is the core protagonist of the musical "Les Mis é rables". His life was full of suffering and misfortune, but he never gave up the quality of kindness from beginning to end. He used to be a farmer living at the bottom of society, imprisoned for stealing bread for nineteen years, and after being released from prison, he was deeply despised by others. Jean Valjean experienced human suffering and truly felt the injustice of society, which once made him hate and hate this society. However, Archbishop Myriel deeply moved him, purifying his soul, re-experiencing the beauty of this world, and experiencing the power of kindness and tolerance. Later, after his leap to become the mayor of Madeleine, Jean Valjean also remembered the spirit of Archbishop Myriel and did his best to help the poor. Jean Valjean had the beautiful qualities of selflessness, justice, and self-sacrifice, which made people see a person who repays good for evil and feel the greatness of the humanistic spirit.

### 1.2. The cold and majestic Javert

Javert is also one of the main characters in the musical "Les Mis é rables". He was once a defender of feudal rulers, which contradicts the character of Jean Valjean. From a certain perspective, he stands in opposition to Jean Valjean. Javert is the embodiment of the executor of law and order, a law-abiding and faithful defender of the interests of the ruling class. He has always been a very principled warden, persisting in the pursuit of Jean Valjean for many years. However, in the process of pursuing Jean Valjean, Jean Valjean's act of repaying good for evil repeatedly shook him, awakening his stubborn thoughts to the point where he could not let go of his own actions and ultimately chose suicide. The portrayal of the character of Javert requires a focus on cold-blooded, cruel, and tough feelings. As Javert and Jean Valjean are opposing roles, they need to be used to highlight Jean Valjean's greatness and selflessness.

## 2. Character Shaping and Analysis of Classic Singing Passages

The musical "Les Mis é rables" portrays the two classic character images of Jean Valjean and Javert through different musical themes. Jean Valjean's theme music is bright and lively, with a long melody and a broad and transparent tone, highlighting Jean Valjean's kind and beautiful personality. Javert's theme music is relatively dull, with a short melody and dark colors, depicting the stubborn and gloomy personality of Javert's warden. *Les Mis é rables* not only uses musical changes to shape the character's personality, but also organically connects music with the character's experiences, to a certain extent endowing music with narrative function, allowing music emotions to change with the story plot, delicately depicting the character's inner world.

### 2.1. The aria of Jean Valjean

《Valjean's Soliloquy》

This passage appears after Jean Valjean suffered unfair treatment in society, lost hope for life, began to resent and give up on himself. Jean Valjean wandered all the way to a church, where the kind bishop took him in and provided him with food and clothing. However, Jean Valjean, who had already lost confidence in life, stole some silver utensils from the church in the middle of the night and was preparing to flee overnight. Unexpectedly, he was arrested by the police who had already been ambushed and confronted in front of the bishop. But the kind bishop helped him and exonerated him, saying that these utensils were given to Jean Valjean by himself, and took out a few exquisite candlesticks and said, "Dear brother, you forgot to bring these things." Jean Valjean, who had already lost faith in the truth, goodness, beauty, and ugliness of human nature, felt the warmth and benevolent radiance again. At this moment, the music played and he sang "Valjean's Soliloquy". His heart was conflicted, not believing that there were such kind and kind people in this world, but also feeling guilty and regretful for his actions. This segment of singing is a series of questions, self-questioning and self-answering, with extremely fast speed, requiring high control of the singer's breathing and breath. The fast-paced first

section is Jean Valjean's summary of his past prison life, while the second section begins to become oppressive and profound. Although the singing speed slows down, the emotions deepen further, becoming Jean Valjean's questioning of his own soul, showing his inner struggle. The performance of this section goes from suppression to outburst, with the vocal cords first lowered and then released. After a period of internal self struggle, he finally made up his mind to start over and shouted, "Jean Valjean is nothing now! Another story must bear!" Jean Valjean's desperate heart once again ignited his hope for life. He tore up his bail certificate, went incognito, and started a new life.

《Who am I》

The second classic aria is about Jean Valjean, who has become the beloved mayor of Madeleine. In order to rescue an elderly man who was crushed by a carriage, he almost exposed his identity in front of the former prison guard Javert, and was recognized by Javert. Although Javert apologized to him, he still set a trap to try to force Jean Valjean to admit his identity. After Javert left, Jean Valjean sang the classic "Who am I", which was also a complex emotional interweaving in the protagonist's heart, deeply depicting his conflicted inner emotions. After becoming the mayor of Madeleine, this section had a heavier pronunciation and a self questioning and self answering style during singing. Compared to before, it appeared more confident and the rhythm was not very fast. After appropriate rest, the dominant motivation was repeatedly used, delicately depicting Jean Valjean's constantly struggling psychological activities: whether to find a scapegoat for oneself or to confess the truth? After a period of self struggle, the rhythm of the music kept slowing down, and the emotions at the end of the singing section became clear and clear, indicating that Jean Valjean ultimately overcame himself, bravely confessed, and finally firmly ended on the high note B<sup>2</sup>, demonstrating Jean Valjean's decision to bravely stand up and admit everything in court.

《Bring him home》

"Bring him home" is the aria at the end of the musical, which fully reflects Jean Valjean's psychological activities: silently praying for Marius and looking forward to his adopted daughter's reunion. In the aria, "he" refers to his daughter's lover Marius, a young man who devoted himself to revolution but may encounter unexpected situations. Jean Valjean, carrying unconscious Marius on his back, escaped from the encirclement of the sewer and took him home. The music here has a soothing and beautiful melody, reflecting Jean Valjean's concern and reluctance towards his daughter, his desire for her happiness while also worrying about her harm, as well as his hope and trust for the young man Marius behind him. This song has a strong religious tone, requiring the singer to use devout and helpless emotions as the tone, treating themselves as a devout believer, making the voice more in line with the scene of praying to God. During the singing process, high volume should not be used, false sounds, weak sounds, and breath should be used, and the breath should be maintained for a long time. There is a high demand and test for the singer's breath, in order to shape Jean Valjean into a compassionate, gentle A noble image.

《Valjean's Confession》

This aria is the last one before Jean Valjean left. Jean Valjean told Marius that he was actually a fugitive and hoped that he could help him keep the secret. Upon learning the truth, Marius apologized to Jean Valjean and hoped that he could stay. Jean Valjean, who bore this charge, was full of guilt and

could not burden Cosette and Marius. He must do so. The music here is gentle and warm. Jean Valjean calmly looks back on his life and entrusts his daughter to Marius, hoping that they can live a good life in the future. The tone here should be gentle and firm, with sincere emotions, expressing a father's selfless love for his daughter.

## 2.2. Javert's aria

《Stars》

The singer of "Stars" is the warden Javert, who swore under the stars that he would pursue Jean Valjean no matter what. The melody of this aria is relatively simple, but it is strong and powerful, expressing a sense of justice advocated by Javert himself. In his singing, one can hear the emotional state of firmness, belief, and persistence, with a great sense of arrogance and responsibility, which is in line with Javert's personality and overall image as a pursuer. It should be noted that although Javert is not a positive character and has a paranoid personality in the play, this singing section is Javert's self-awareness and shaping. The entire singing section should be full of confidence and strength, demonstrating Javert's courage and justice. Secondly, the emotional expression of the singer during the performance must be rhythmically progressive, and in addition to firmness, they must also demonstrate the unique calm personality of the prison warden. On the surface, there may be a contradiction between excited emotions and calm personality, but specifically for Javert, the two are actually unified.

《Javert's suicide》

Javert infiltrated the uprising army and was discovered by the rebels, who bound him inside and controlled him. Later, Jean Valjean stepped forward to command the uprising army and achieved victory. In return, the rebels handed Javert over to Jean Valjean for disposal. At this time, Javert remained stubborn, believing that Jean Valjean would take the opportunity to retaliate against him, but Jean Valjean let him go. Jean Valjean's act of repaying kindness deeply stimulated Javert's soul, breaking away from Javert's unwavering beliefs, he sang "Javert's suicide" in despair. This piece of music vividly depicts Javert's psychological activities, The whole piece of music goes from intense to calm, and then to the final burst. At the beginning, there were continuous and rapid questioning, followed by a gradual despair, acceptance of reality, and finally, inability to accept it, emotional breakdown, and ultimately jumping into the river to commit suicide. This musical excerpt elevates the conflict between Jean Valjean and Javert from class conflict to soul conflict. The sublimation of this dramatic conflict enhances the theatrical expression of the entire musical, and expands and deepens the thematic ideas of the work.

## 3. The Dramatic Conflict between Jean Valjean and Javert

The musical "Les Mis é rables" is full of dramatic conflicts, and Jean Valjean and Javert's singing styles are more focused on classical bel canto. The rich and powerful singing styles enhance the dramatic authenticity and expressiveness of the characters. Both of them have their own beliefs, and the contradictions between the two effectively promote the development of the plot, increasing the artistic appeal and expressiveness of the works.

《Look down》

At the beginning, a group of prisoners are working hard,

and the powerful horn of the theme song "Look down" rings, which directly explains the time, place, and cause of the story, while depicting the hardships of the prisoner's life. Prison guard Javert stands from a high place and looks down on all of this, representing the huge gap between these two classes. The continuously descending melody of the music suggests the oppressed prison life of the prisoners, and the powerful rhythm is like the powerful cry of the prisoners trying to resist. The powerful atmosphere of this work lays the foundation for the entire musical: oppression and resistance. In the first act, a duet is used to depict the conflict between the two. Even after Jean Valjean announced his release, Javert persisted and questioned him in a threatening and contemptuous tone, "Do you know what your release means?" Jean Valjean replied, "It means I am free!" And Javert said, "No, it means that although you have been granted parole, you are still a thief.", The personalities of the two individuals were fully revealed. Javert was extreme and stubborn, while Jean Valjean was kind and simple. The irreconcilable contradiction between the two propelled the plot forward and laid the foundation for the subsequent development of the plot.

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## 4. Conclusion

"Les Mis é rables" is one of the few classic musicals of the 20th century. It uses music, drama, and dance, and through outstanding performances by actors, portrays the love, hate, and hatred of ordinary people in the context of the French Revolution, and portrays the struggle of human nature. His character has a distinct personality and significant dramatic conflicts, effectively conveying the spirit of love in the original work, and has extremely high artistic value.

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