



FREN3720 MW 1:45-3:15 pm

Professor Andrea Goulet

Crime and Punishment: Hugo's *Les Misérables* in Context

Long before the revolutionary ardor of Marius and the innocent longing of Cosette graced Broadway stages and Hollywood screens, the characters of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* (1862) tugged at the heartstrings of readers all over the world. Through this blockbuster novel, Hugo combined his Romantic aesthetics with political critique by exposing the ways in which French society oppressed its downtrodden members, the "misérables" of the title; he also called for a recognition that a noble spirit could inhabit unlikely figures like the prostitute and the ex-convict. In this seminar, we will read *Les Misérables* in its entirety, along with related texts on crime and punishment in 19th-century France.

We will ask questions such as these: how can literature contribute to debates about penal reform and the death penalty? What is divine justice? How does crime relate to political, collective forms of violence? How can we map the urban topographies of hygiene and violence in post-Revolutionary Paris? How does Hugo's novel relate to the sordid *faits divers*, gazette entries, and criminal memoirs whose lurid illustrations and sensationalism fascinated the nation's "respectable" citizens? Students will also be given the opportunity for guided original research on criminality and the popular press of 19th-century France, using online resources and the holdings of Penn's Rare Books and Manuscript library.

NB: All discussions and readings in French (including Hugo's 2000-page novel!)