

Géraldine Crahay: The Insecure Masculinity of Zealous Civil Servants: The Operative and the Inspector

In *Serenity* (2005), the Operative (Chiwetel Ejiofor) obsessively pursues River Tam (and incidentally the crew of the *Serenity* spaceship) in order to protect the darkest secret of the Alliance, the totalitarian government that he serves, whilst ignoring the nature of this secret. In Victor Hugo's novel *Les Misérables* (1862), Inspector Javert chases a penitent convict on the loose, Jean Valjean, for more than fifteen years. Both civil servants blindly serve a power that overwhelms them, whether it be the Alliance or successive French governments (from Napoleon's Empire to the July Monarchy). Their identity is so completely intertwined with these entities that discovering their evil nature or the good nature of their so-called enemies brings their universe upside down. This paper completes David Magill's article "I Aim to Misbehave": Masculinities in the 'Verse' (*Investigating Firefly and Serenity* 76–86), which mostly explored the masculinity of Mal Reynolds, at the expense of that of the 'bad guys'. It argues that *Serenity*'s Operative and *Les Misérables*'s Inspector Javert embody to the extreme bureaucratic officials who sacrifice personal values and identities to fulfil their civic function. Renouncing their individuality allows these civil servants to conceal their insecure masculinity. They intend to posit themselves as models of virility, notably by adopting the postures of the hunter and the warrior, only to fail to develop themselves as complete men. Their masculinity therefore contrasts with that displayed by Mal, which is notably based on honour and an ethical code (Magill 79). Paradoxically, this paper shows that abandoning official 'truths' to embrace their own uncertainties is the only way for the Operative and Inspector Javert to assert truly their masculine identity.