

Excellence Rejected

by [James Delingpole](#) (June 2019)



French Theatre, Honoré Daumier, 1857

Does it matter that in the recent movie biopic *Mary Queen of Scots* (set, of course, in 16th century England and Scotland) Queen Elizabeth's ambassador to the Scottish court, Lord Thomas Randolph is black?

How irritated should we be that in the BBC's latest adaptation of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*—set in 1830s France—the character of Inspector Javert is played by an actor of Nigerian heritage, David Oyelowo?

Can there be any rational explanation for the decision by the BBC Two documentary *1066: A Year to Conquer England*, to have William of Normandy's envoy to King Harold played by a black actor?

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Before I attempt to give my answers to these vexed, contentious and potentially incriminating questions—(spoiler alert: they're "Yes," "Very," and "None whatsoever")—I'd like to go back to first principles and ask a more fundamental question.

How can we tell the difference between bad art and good art?

It's a question I've been pondering all my adult life, first as a university undergraduate studying English Literature, subsequently as a critic of books, films, theatre, television and rock music.

Though the genres and media may seem wildly different—*Dark Side of the Moon*