

Creative Works

Heroic Justice for Quasimodo Through Re-creation: Examining Disney's Denial of Romance and the Hero's Journey

Talia Steinmetz,

Montclair State University

Abstract

By analyzing disability stereotypes and story structure, this paper critiques how Disney's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* denies Quasimodo romantic opportunity because he does not fit the heteronormative abled model of a Hero. Based on these intersectional issues, this paper ends with an alternative script to give Quasimodo heroic justice.

Keywords: Hunchback of Notre Dame, Hero's Journey, ableism

The following essay and creative rendition of Disney's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* began as a final project for an undergraduate course about disability in U.S. pop culture. The assignment was to analyze a negative representation of disability in entertainment and to "fix it" through re-creating it in a less ableist manner. In what follows, I present my initial critique of Disney's adaptation and assess the existing disability studies scholarship that has already analyzed Quasimodo. I take these arguments further by showing how Disney's denial of romantic opportunity reinforces stereotypes of disability and asexuality and by analyzing these themes in the context of intersectionality. Lastly, I end with a re-creation of key scenes from the film which demonstrate an alternative, more realistic disability story.

The Hunchback of Notre Dame as Current Media

I chose to analyze Disney's 1996 film *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* because of its continued contemporary importance. In 2019, Disney announced that a live-action remake of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* was in development with well-known creatives such as Alan Menken, Steven Schwartz, and Josh Gad already committed to the project (Fleming, 2019). Fans of the original movie have already been asking about casting on social media and suggesting dream casts (Gad, 2021; Hammer, 2021; Pádraig, 2020; Suhas, 2019). But while there has been concern about the racial/ethnic problems of the animated film in regards to the portrayal of Romani people, or Roma, (referred to as "gypsies" in the film, a word considered a slur today), there have been only a few articles discussing the portrayal of Quasimodo as disabled (Gardner, 2019; Lopez & Panchanathan, 2019; Second Nexus Editorial, 2019; Suhas, 2019).

Representation of disabled people is lacking in mainstream media, especially positive intersectional portrayals. Intersectionality in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* exists between

disability, gender and sexuality, and racial/ethnic oppression. As an influential producer of media, Disney has the opportunity and the means to represent multiple oppressed groups through intersectionality, and, if done well with positive representation, they could alter perspectives of viewers. Disney's films are repeatedly at the top of the box office and remain in the public consciousness with the additional marketing and merchandise of each film (Clark, 2019). Disney continues to be influential in setting an example of what is accepted and "normal" in society. Their films uniquely appeal to all ages, seemingly targeted at children while including storylines and humor that adults enjoy as well (Resene, 2017).

I argue that one of the reasons that Disney's films are repeatedly successful is due to their use of story structure. By using this structure, Disney's films are familiar, easy to follow, and satisfying. This allows films to be successful while still creating strong, interesting plots for the audience. However, I argue that due to Quasimodo's disability, Disney broke away from their foundational rules of storytelling in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, thus denying him a true role as Hero.

By analyzing Disney's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* from an intersectional lens combined with the lens of film critique and then using that analysis to rewrite sections of the script, I offer a solution to the ableism and representational issues that occur repeatedly in Hollywood. Films can be made to be entertaining while still having intersectional representation and addressing social justice issues.

Disney's Adaptation of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996)

The Hunchback of Notre Dame (Trousdale & Wise, 1996) is one of Disney's darkest animated films, including themes of ethnic oppression, sexism, sexual harassment, ableism, and abuse, to name only a few. *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* did eventually achieve a G

rating after some edits, though it was not these adult themes, the violence, the death or “the use of the word ‘hell’ or ‘damnation’ that the [ratings] board took issue with” (Bahr, 2021, para. 32) but small details instead, such as needing to muffle the word “sin” in the song “Hellfire.” Adapted from Victor Hugo’s novel published in 1831, the Disney version differs greatly, diluting the plot to focus on the character known as the Hunchback, or Quasimodo. In the original novel, Quasimodo is the bell ringer of Notre Dame after being abandoned there as a baby (Hugo, 1831/2009). He is born with what is described as a “hunchback” (medically known as kyphosis), and he is also described as having a large wart covering most of his right eye (Mayo Clinic, 2020). Quasimodo also becomes deaf as he lives and works in the bell tower. When translated into the Disney film, Quasimodo’s character still has a “hunchback”, but his eye is no longer covered by a wart (though it does appear as if he’s squinting at times), and he is no longer deaf. Quasimodo falls in love with a Romani woman, Esmeralda, whom he tries to protect from his racist guardian, Judge Frollo. Captain Phoebus works for Frollo before falling in love with Esmeralda, becoming her and Quasimodo’s ally against Frollo.

Literature Review

The Hunchback of Notre Dame & Disability

A wide range of academic work has been written about *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* since the original novel by Victor Hugo was first released in 1831 (Horowitz, 2014; Joshua, 2011; Ledder & Münte, 2019). As the famous story has been adapted many times since its original publication, some articles solely focus on theater or older film/TV adaptations (Avery, 2004; Horowitz, 2014; Nyman, 2010; Szwydky, 2010; Whittington-Walsh, 2002).

The Disney version directed by Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise (1996) has been

analyzed as well with scholars mainly focusing on variations from the book, racial/ethnic representation, religious allusions, or gender presentation (Al-Othmani, 2014; Artman, 2016; Fadner, 2016; Hancock, 2008; Johnson, 2019). And while some works have examined the Disney version in regards to disability studies, most have used Quasimodo as a brief example of a disabled character within a larger critique on disability tropes (Longmore, 2003; Norden, 2013; Purcell, 2020), such as the “Obsessive Avenger” (Norden, 2007, p. 128) and the “Innocent Fool” (Hess, 2019, p. 4). I expand on these analyses by considering how disability stereotypes intersect with film theory, specifically how the tropes affect the Hero’s Journey.

Film Theory

The Hero’s Journey, or monomyth, was coined by Joseph Campbell, and is one of the most well-known structure for storytelling. It models a pattern seen in myths across cultures that supports a “shared unconsciousness and reflect[s] universal concerns” (Vogler, 2007, p. 4-5). Campbell’s Hero’s Journey begins with the Hero’s Call to Adventure. The Hero must have a want or need that they pursue or confront on the Journey. The Hero encounters several archetypal characters, such as Allies, Mentors, and Shadows, or characters who challenge the Hero, such as the antagonist. The Hero goes through a series trials before the Hero rises again for the Climax, the final confrontation against the antagonist. Hollywood films typically end happily with a successful Hero who obtains their want as a reward, often a female “love object” for cis male Heroes (fulfilling society’s heteronormative expectations). This story structure creates a familiar plot path that is satisfying and is almost expected now in Hollywood films due to its consistent use in film and other media.

Other works in disability studies have discussed the Hero’s Journey in relation to disability, but none have focused on Disney’s *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. One work explored the Hero’s Journey in regards to Hugo’s original book, but Hugo’s text varies

greatly from the Disney film so the analysis is largely inapplicable (Wildgen, 1976). Other works examined disability representation in films, such as *Percy Jackson: The Lightning Thief* or *Frozen*, but they only briefly discussed the Hero's Journey (Natalia & Djundjung, 2015; Resene, 2017). My work here attempts to integrate both disability studies and film theory to examine disability representation in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*.

Gender & Sexuality

While some scholarship mentions Quasimodo's unrequited love towards Esmeralda, only a few examine it from a disability studies perspective (Avery, 2004; Norden, 2013). Some works even defend why Quasimodo's love was unrequited (Lorenz & Panchanathan, 2009), such as a review that claimed Disney had made a "very wise choice in keeping Quasimodo 'single'" and deviating from the repetitive "'happily-ever-after'" (McCord, 1998, p. 93). However, I argue that making Quasimodo's affections unrequited is harmful. As Kathi Wolfe remarked, "What does this movie say about those of us with disabilities? It says...that no matter how heroic we are, we will never have a loving romantic relationship" (1996, p. 32).

This harmful assumption has been noted in previous disability scholarship: that all disabled people are asexual *because* they are disabled (Lund & Johnson, 2015). In addition, in media, asexuality is mostly represented in disabled characters, resulting in the belief that "'people' are assumed to be sexual while 'people with disabilities' are assumed to be asexual" (Lund & Johnson, 2015, p. 129). This not only reinforces the stigma that disabled people are inherently asexual, but it also reinforces the belief that asexuality is something to "cure" or "treat" under the Medical Model of disability rather than being understood as a legitimate sexuality (Haller & Zhang, 2014). Asexuality *is* a sexual identity, independent of any other factors, defined as "someone who does not experience sexual attraction or an

intrinsic desire to have sexual relationships” (Asexual Visibility and Education Network, 2021), but they may still experience romantic attraction. Romantic and sexual attraction are often incorrectly conflated in society, thus the belief that if disabled people are asexual, then they also are aromantic (lack romantic attraction) and therefore are not potential partners. Disney’s adaptation reinforces these stigmas through Quasimodo’s unrequited love for Esmeralda.

Previous works examining gender focused mostly on Esmeralda’s representation in the Disney film (Hancock, 2008; Johnson, 2019). One briefly examined Quasimodo’s role as a masculine hero but only in terms of morals and ethics. (Artman, 2016). None examined the film in terms of how gender is performed and “effects a false stabilization of gender in the interests of heterosexual construction” (Butler, 2004, p. 110) – in other words, how society’s mandatory heteronormative structure demands gender be performed in specific ways, including, as McRuer explains, being *abled* (Ledder & Münte, 2019). Previous scholarship also did not address Quasimodo’s romantic arc through connections between disability, gender, sexuality, and the Hero’s Journey as I do below.

Quasimodo’s Hero Denial

First, Quasimodo is introduced as the protagonist in the prologue’s musical number. As the Hero, according to the Hero’s Journey, Quasimodo must be relatable, learn or grow the most out of all other characters, and be active and drive the story forward (Vogler, 2007). But sacrifice is “the true mark of a Hero... [his] willingness to give up something of value, perhaps even [his] own life” (Vogler, 2007, p. 31). Quasimodo, therefore, does meet the requirements of a Hero. He is relatable; he grows in his character arc over the film; his actions move the narrative forward; and, he is willing to risk his own life to save Esmeralda.

However, the most important part of being the Hero is the “Elixir” that the successful Hero gets at the end of their journey (Vogler, 2007). This can be in the form of new knowledge, an object, or love — “one of the most powerful and popular Elixirs” (Vogler, 2007, p. 221). This is where the Disney film fails Quasimodo. Plot points are set up in the film early on to be paid off later. Esmeralda is introduced and set up as a love interest for Quasimodo. When Quasimodo is humiliated and abused at the Festival of Fools, Esmeralda steps forward to help him. Later, Esmeralda finds Quasimodo in Notre Dame, and they get to know each other. When she leaves, Esmeralda kisses him on the forehead, promising to visit. Quasimodo also has two songs about his feelings for her, furthering this set up.

Therefore, following the Hero’s Journey, Quasimodo’s Elixir would be a romantic relationship with Esmeralda. However, this never happens. Instead, Esmeralda starts a relationship with Phoebus. In the middle of the film, Esmeralda rescues Phoebus from a river after he is injured by Frollo's guards, and she brings him to Quasimodo to keep him safe. There, Esmeralda and Phoebus kiss in front of Quasimodo, who looks away, crushed. He later states to one of his gargoyle friends:

What am I supposed to do? Go out there and rescue the girl from the jaws of death, and the whole town will cheer like I'm some sort of hero? She already has her knight in shining armor, and it's not me. (Trousdale & Wise, 1996)

This variation from the Hero's Journey is not a coincidence. If Quasimodo were not disabled, he would never have been denied the romantic relationship with Esmeralda. But because of Quasimodo’s disabilities, he is portrayed as Other in the film - he is not “male” enough. Phoebus, though, is exaggerated into the ideal heteronormative male - tall, muscled, and confident (Avery, 2004). While Quasimodo does save Esmeralda, he does not fit the heteronormative abled binary, so he is not allowed to be a suitable partner for Esmeralda.

Instead, Phoebus fills this last part of the Hero's role, succeeding in a romantic relationship with Esmeralda.

Furthermore, once Phoebus steps in as a substitute Hero with Esmeralda, Quasimodo is no longer even associated with sexuality. At the end, Esmeralda and Phoebus go to the steps of Notre Dame, greeting the crowd. Esmeralda returns for Quasimodo, who is still inside. It then cuts to his point-of-view, looking up at Esmeralda as she offers him her hand, like a mother might offer her hand to a child.

This moment with Esmeralda precedes another childlike connotation as the first character to greet Quasimodo on the steps is a young girl. However, even this girl treats Quasimodo like a mother as she touches his face and then pets his hair — almost like a mother might soothe a child. This infantilization is further emphasized as Phoebus and Esmeralda watch in the background like proud parents (Byrne & McQuillan, 1999). Thus, Quasimodo's returned qualities as the Innocent Fool complete Disney's ableist denial of the Hero's Journey to him.

Author Notes on Rewriting Excerpts of the Script

To allow Quasimodo a full Hero identity, I rewrote the script with the aim of presenting him as a complex adult with a successful romantic relationship. I could have made it more intersectional with the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ characters or writing Quasimodo as D/deaf as he is in the original Victor Hugo novel. However, I wanted to focus on rewriting the story with the characters as they exist in the Disney film so as to focus on correcting the intersectional issues already present and allowing Quasimodo his complete Hero's Journey.

I did not remove how Quasimodo was treated by Frollo or all ableism for two reasons: first, unfortunately, the oppression and discrimination has historical background. So, there is

some accuracy to how Quasimodo was treated and to disregard history, I believe, would be to ignore the struggle of disabled people throughout history. Second, this abuse is something that disabled people still encounter today. For instance, Frolo could represent an exaggeration of an overprotective parent of a disabled child who prevents them from being independent. Of course, Frolo's reasons for isolating Quasimodo are not out of overprotectiveness or love, but the effect is similar. Quasimodo is isolated, has very little comprehension of the real world, feels frustrated with his situation, has low self-esteem, etc.

I also humanized Quasimodo's actions and movements. In the Disney film, Quasimodo can break through chains, move heavy objects, scale buildings, etc. Some of this strength may be realistic as he does work in the bell tower. However, the imagery also has bestial associations. For instance, when Quasimodo encounters Phoebus looking for Esmeralda, Quasimodo reacts violently, swinging a torch towards him and yelling. He is not speaking in full sentences though, just grunts and phrases. Next, there is the image of Quasimodo breaking through the thick chains on top of the roof before rescuing Esmeralda, looking almost like a bear breaking free. To address these issues, I gave Quasimodo full sentences in the scene with Phoebus. I also replaced the scene where he breaks out of the chains with him escaping past guards by using his familiarity with the bell tower.

Most importantly to the Hero's Journey, I developed Quasimodo's romantic chemistry with Esmeralda and gave them a happy ending together. I kept lines about Quasimodo's insecurities though, as those anxieties are plausible for anyone to have, regardless of disability. Even the line in the song "Heaven's Light" ("Though I might wish with all my might / No face as hideous as my face / Was ever meant for heaven's light") (Trousdale & Wise, 1996) could work for anyone's anxieties about their appearance, such as acne scarring or a birthmark. In addition, even if Quasimodo was referring to his disabilities,

this song comes soon after the Festival of Fools, and the harassment would certainly have renewed any insecurities he had.

My aim was to make Quasimodo's story more realistic in its portrayal of disability. His disability is still noticed and marks him as different, but I also aimed to recognize how that affected him over time instead of ignoring it. Quasimodo is also recognized as equal a suitor to Esmeralda as Phoebus is, granting Quasimodo the full role of the Hero that Disney had denied him.

Quasimodo's Heroic Justice: Excerpts of a Re-created Script

Excerpt One^{1, 2}

(Quasimodo and Esmeralda proceed onto the balcony to a beautiful view of Paris.)

Esmeralda: I bet the king himself doesn't have a view like this! I could stay up here forever.

Quasimodo: You could, you know.

Esmeralda: No, I couldn't.

Quasimodo: Oh, yes, you have sanctuary!

Esmeralda: But not freedom.

Quasimodo: I don't have freedom either. But the view is beautiful at least.

Esmeralda: Who keeps you here?

Quasimodo: Judge Claude Frollo. I was abandoned as a baby, so he took me in.

Esmeralda: Frollo raised you?

Quasimodo: Well, technically? He gave me food and had the cathedral give me shelter. But he also tells me I'm a monster, so...

Esmeralda: He tells you that?

Quasimodo: All the time. But it doesn't make sense.

Esmeralda: Give me your hand.

(She takes his hand and looks at his palm.)

Quasimodo: Why?

Esmeralda: Just let me see. (*Tracing his palm lines with her finger*) Hmm, a long lifeline... Oh, and you'll have a long and happy romantic relationship with someone. But... Hmm... I don't see any.

Quasimodo: Any what?

Esmeralda: Monster lines. Not a single one.

(*Quasimodo takes his hand back, examining it himself.*)

Quasimodo: It never made sense when Frollo called me that... I can't read all that well, but I overhear mass all the time. And the archdeacon always says that Jesus loves all people. But Frollo says—

Esmeralda: Frollo also says that Roma, “gypsies”³ are evil. Now you look at me. Do you think I'm evil?

Quasimodo: No, no! You are kind, and good, and—

Esmeralda: And Roma. So maybe Frollo's wrong about the both of us.

(*Quasimodo stares at her thoughtfully, looking at his hand again.*)

Quasimodo: I have an idea to get you free.

Esmeralda: But there's no way out. There's soldiers at every door.

Quasimodo: We won't use a door.

Esmeralda: You mean... climb down?

Quasimodo: Sure. You carry him (*motions to Djali, Esmeralda's goat*), you climb on my back.

Esmeralda: Are you sure that's safe?

Quasimodo: I climb around the bell tower all the time to get to all the bells — just hold onto me. I'll be careful.

Esmeralda: Okay. Come on, Djali.

(*Djali hops into her arms.*)

Quasimodo: Ready?

Esmeralda: Yes.

Quasimodo: Don't be afraid.

Esmeralda: I'm not afraid.

(Quasimodo leaps over the edge and holds on to a gargoyle head.)

Esmeralda: Now I'm afraid.

Quasimodo: The trick is not to look down.

(Quasimodo begins swinging down the exterior of the cathedral.)

Esmeralda: You've done this before?

Quasimodo: No.

(Quasimodo finally stops on a slanted roof.)

Esmeralda: Wow. You're quite an acrobat.

Quasimodo: Thank you—

(His words are cut short as the tile they're on breaks free and they begin to slide down the roof as if they were on a sled. They're able to jump off their sled just before it goes sailing off into the air. It lands a few blocks away. The guards on the ground hear the crash and go off to investigate.)

Guard 4: Check the alley!

Guard 5: This way!

(As guards pass, Quasimodo, Esmeralda and Djali hide as part of a statue. When the coast is clear, they speak again.)

Quasimodo: That was close... Is Djali okay?

Esmeralda: *(catching her breath)* Yeah, just a little startled.

Quasimodo: You should get going before the guards come back.

Esmeralda: Come with me. To the Court of Miracles. Leave this place.

Quasimodo: I don't know... You saw what happened to me today. *(He rubs his shoulder where the skin is still raw under his shirt from the ropes earlier that day at the Festival of Fools.)* What if that happens again?

Esmeralda: All right, then I'll come to see you.

Quasimodo: What? Here? But, the soldiers, and Frollo, and...

Esmeralda: I'll come after sunset.

Quasimodo: At sunset, I ring the evening mass, and after that, I clean the cloisters, and then I ring the vespers, and—

Esmeralda: Quasimodo?

Quasimodo: And then I have to— yes?

(Esmeralda gives Quasimodo a little peck on the cheek.)

Esmeralda: We can do those things together. Can I come visit?

Quasimodo: *(blushing red as he raises a hand to feel the spot on his cheek where she kissed him. He nods.)* We can even watch the sunrise together sometime. Just be careful.

Esmeralda: I'd like that. And if you ever need your own sanctuary and freedom—

(Esmeralda pulls a talisman off her neck and hands it to Quasimodo.)

Esmeralda: —this will show you the way.

Quasimodo: But how?

Esmeralda: Just remember: When you wear this woven band, you hold the city in your hand.

(Djali bleats as the guards are returning.)

Quasimodo: Hurry! You must go!

(Quasimodo puts the necklace around his neck, squeezing Esmeralda's hand in goodbye. Esmeralda swings down a rope to the ground and runs off into the dark. Quasimodo climbs back up to his tower. As soon as he reaches the door to the steps down, Phoebus appears.)

Phoebus: Hi there. I'm looking for the gypsy³ girl. Have you seen her?

(Quasimodo takes a step back, suspicious.)

Quasimodo: No. Get out.

Phoebus: Hey, man. I'm just—

Quasimodo: You're just leaving. Get out!

Phoebus: Wait! All I wanted was to—

Quasimodo: Go!

Phoebus: I mean her no harm!

Quasimodo: Liar. You work for Frollo. Now, get out!

(Quasimodo tries to move past Phoebus. Phoebus follows him down the stairs, reaching for his arm as they reach the bottom. Quasimodo flinches, shoving Phoebus away and moving back.)

Quasimodo: Don't touch me!

Phoebus: Okay, okay. I'm sorry. Just— You tell her from me, I didn't mean to trap her here, but it was the only way to save her life. Will you tell her that? *(No response.)* Will you?

Quasimodo: If you go. Now!

Phoebus: I'm going, okay?

(Phoebus starts to leave, then turns to say something.)

Phoebus: Oh. And one more thing. I'm sorry about what happened at the festival today.

Quasimodo: Why didn't you do something— *(he eyes Phoebus's uniform)* — Captain?

Phoebus: I wasn't free to—

Quasimodo: No! You are free! You could have done something, but you did nothing! You just stood and watched as I was tied up and beaten! Harassed!

Phoebus: Frolo would have—

Quasimodo: Don't tell me what Frolo would have done to you! *I know!* I've dealt with it for 20 years! So don't say that you're sorry or that you pity me when you would never have done anything differently.

Phoebus: ... I would've— I'll just go then... I'm still sorry.

(Exit Phoebus. Quasimodo returns to his room and the gargoyles.)

Hugo: Hey, hey! There he is! Yeah! Ooh-hoo!

Victor: You ejected that tin-plated baboon with great panache!

Hugo: The nerve of him! Trying to give some weak apology! And then snooping around here trying to steal your girl.

Quasimodo: My girl?

Laverne: Esmeralda. Dark hair, works with a goat. Remember?

Hugo: Boy, I do! Way to go, loverboy!

Quasimodo: Loverboy!?! Oh, no, no...

Laverne: Oh, don't be so modest.

Quasimodo: Look. I appreciate what you're all trying to do, but let's not fool ourselves. Ugliest face in all Paris, remember? I'm not exactly handsome, human or monster. Anyway, she deserves someone who is free to explore everything out there with her. *(The gargoyles slowly melt into the background as Quasimodo begins to sing, "Heaven's Light".)*

SO MANY TIMES OUT THERE
I'VE WATCHED A HAPPY PAIR
OF LOVERS WALKING IN THE NIGHT.
THEY HAD A KIND OF GLOW AROUND THEM
IT ALMOST LOOKED LIKE HEAVEN'S LIGHT.
I KNEW I'D NEVER KNOW
THAT WARM AND LOVING GLOW
THOUGH I MIGHT WISH WITH ALL MY MIGHT
NO FACE AS HIDEOUS AS MY FACE
WAS EVER MEANT FOR HEAVEN'S LIGHT

BUT SUDDENLY AN ANGEL HAS SMILED AT ME
AND KISSED MY CHEEK WITHOUT A TRACE OF FRIGHT

I DARE TO DREAM THAT SHE
MIGHT EVEN CARE FOR ME
AND AS I RING THESE BELLS TONIGHT
MY COLD DARK TOWER SEEMS SO BRIGHT
I SWEAR IT MUST BE HEAVEN'S LIGHT!

Excerpt Two

(A huge crowd has gathered to watch the burning of Esmeralda, who is on a pyre. Frollo stands next to her. Roma and Phoebus watch from barred wagons. As the archdeacon comes out to see what is happening, guards block him off.)

Frollo: The prisoner Esmeralda has been found guilty of the crime of witchcraft. The sentence: death!

(Cheers go up from the crowd.)

Frollo: *(Leans close to Esmeralda)* The time has come, gypsy. You stand upon the brink of the abyss. Yet even now, it is not too late. I can save you from the flames of this world, and the next. Choose me, or the fire.

(She spits in his face. The crowd gasps in horror.)

Frollo: The gypsy Esmeralda has refused to recant. This evil witch has put the soul of every citizen of Paris in mortal danger...

(His voice trails off as we fly up to Quasimodo in the bell tower. Two guards stand watch — one at the door to the stairs down and one at the balcony. The gargoyles come back to life as Quasimodo moves towards the newly barred window for some privacy.)

Hugo: Come on, Quasimodo! Snap out of it!

Victor: Your friends are down there!

Quasimodo: It's all my fault. I led Frollo to the Romani hideout.

Laverne: How could you have known Frollo was following you? Come on, Esmeralda needs your help!

Quasimodo: Yeah, but I'm up here! And she — *(he looks out the bars on his window to the pyre in the middle of the square)* she's down there.

Victor: But you can't let Frollo win!

Quasimodo: *(angrily)* How can I stop him?! I'm stuck up here.

Hugo: So, you're giving up? That's it?

Quasimodo: No! I just—

(Quasimodo sees Esmeralda below, about to be burned at the stake. He presses his hand to his cheek where she had kissed him before.)

Frollo: ...for justice, for Paris, and for her own salvation! It is my shameful duty to send this unholy demon back where she belongs!

Quasimodo: NO!!

(At his shout, the guards draw their swords. Quasimodo moves towards the balcony door.)

Guard 1: Turn back around.

(Quasimodo hesitates before dodging and running to the left, towards the beams underneath the bells. The guards shout at him, chasing after him to catch him. Quasimodo nimbly leaps from beam to beam, comfortable balancing after having done it his whole life. One guard trips, letting out a yell and falling. Quasimodo grimaces at the yell, but he keeps moving, heading back to the balcony. He looks down at the square as—

Frollo touches the torch to the pyre, starting the fire.)

Quasimodo: Esmeralda!

(He looks around, spotting a rope left behind from recent roof repairs. He loops an end of the rope around a gargoyle, rappelling down the side of the cathedral. He jumps off, landing on

the platform and knocking into a guard. The guard falls to the floor, dazed. Quasimodo grabs the guard's sword, holding it in front of himself defensively before using it to cut through Esmeralda's ropes.)

Frollo: Guards! Seize him!

(Phoebus, tied in the wagon from the jail, realizes what is happening and quickly picks a fight with a guard, creating a distraction. Split into groups, the guards hesitate where to go, allowing Quasimodo to carefully pick up Esmeralda in a fireman's hold as he grabs the rope, swinging back to a low ledge on the second floor of the cathedral. He climbs through the open window, holding Esmeralda as he looks up at the sky desperately.)

Quasimodo: Sanctuary! Sanctuary! God, if you can hear me, if you're there, I beg for sanctuary for her!

(All is silent in the courtyard as everyone stares up at the window with Quasimodo. Frollo sneers, stalking towards the cathedral doors with a group of guards.)

Quasimodo: SANCTUARY!! SANCTUARY!! SANCTUARY!!

(Fighting breaks out between Frollo, Phoebus, Quasimodo, the guards, Roma, and the citizens of Paris. Quasimodo brings Esmeralda to a room in the cathedral as she is still unconscious from smoke inhalation before going to help defend the cathedral from inside.)

Excerpt Three

(Quasimodo returns to Esmeralda's side as the fighting slows, not knowing that Frollo made his way inside.)

Quasimodo: We've done it, Esmeralda! We've beaten them back! Come and see!

(She doesn't move.)

Quasimodo: Esmeralda? Wake up! You're safe now.

(He squeezes her hand gently, but still nothing.)

Quasimodo: Esmeralda? Oh, no!

(He tries again, tapping her cheek lightly. She doesn't respond.)

Quasimodo: No, no. Esmeralda? But... you're free now.

(He begins to cry. Frollo enters and touches Quasimodo on his shoulder. Quasimodo flinches, pulling away, but Frollo grips his shoulder tighter as if it's comforting.)

Frollo: Exactly. She is free. Her soul will be judged, and justice will be served.

Quasimodo: No. You— You *killed* her.

Frollo: It was my duty, horrible as it was.

Quasimodo: Then your duty is wrong!

(He wrenches free of Frollo's grip, still facing away from him though, kneeling next to Esmeralda's still body protectively.)

Quasimodo: What did she ever do that was wrong?

Frollo: Her? Quasimodo, she's a gypsy. She commits witchcraft. Her people are sinners.

Quasimodo: But she harmed *no one!*

(Frollo pauses, looking at Quasimodo thoughtfully. A small laugh escapes him.)

Frollo: Oh, you poor, sweet boy. Have you fallen in love with her? Do you think she could really ever love you? She's all witchcraft and trickery. Lust. A deadly sin, my boy.

Quasimodo: No— no. She is kind and warm, gentle.

Frollo: All lies. She played you like she played Captain Phoebus.

Quasimodo: Phoebus...?

Frollo: And you, you're so naïve, Quasimodo, that you fell for it. She would have sold your soul to the devil. There, there, Quasimodo, I know it hurts. But now, the time has come to end your suffering, forever. Heartbreak is painful, but I promise— it won't hurt much longer.

(We see that Frollo has a dagger. As Frollo raises it to stab him, Quasimodo sees the shadow of the dagger. He turns and struggles with Frollo before taking the dagger from Frollo's hands. Nervously, Frollo backs away, his hands up.)

Frollo: *(nervously)* Now, now, listen to me, Quasimodo.

Quasimodo: *(angrily)* No, you listen! All my life you have told me the world is a dark, cruel place. That people will hate me! That I'm a monster! And— and some people are mean, but—

(Quasimodo glances back at Esmeralda for a moment before turning to glare at Frollo.)

Quasimodo: That's not always true! People can be truly kind and the brightest of bright stars. And some — *(thinking back to Phoebus — ignorant but well-meaning towards him)* some might not do everything the best way, but they mean no harm by it.

(Quasimodo looks at the dagger in his hand, his reflection appearing distorted in the bevels of the blade.)

Quasimodo: You told me I was a monster, a hideous creature that people would fear and hate. But now, I see that the monster is you! Full of hatred and cruel thoughts, seeking out violence. I won't be like you. *(He throws away the dagger.)*

Esmeralda: *(weakly)* Quasimodo?

(Quasimodo turns and sees Esmeralda sitting on the bed.)

Quasimodo: Esmeralda!

Frollo: She lives! *(he grabs a sword.)*

Quasimodo: No!

(He picks Esmeralda up and runs out onto the balcony. Frollo follows, but when he gets outside, he sees nothing but gargoyles. After looking left and right, he looks out over the edge and finds Quasimodo hanging there with Esmeralda.)

Frollo: Leaving so soon?

(He swings his sword, but Quasimodo dodges the blow by swinging onto scaffolding from the roof repairs. Frollo goes to swing again.)

Quasimodo: In here!

(Quasimodo helps Esmeralda inside through a broken window. Frollo jumps down, blocking him.)

Frollo: I should have known you'd risk your life to save that gypsy witch. Just as your own mother died trying to save you.

Quasimodo: What!?

Frollo: Your filthy gypsy mother resisted arrest. She ran, holding you, and she fell. Against my better judgement, I let you live, thinking you would be of use to me one day. But now I'm going to do what I should have done twenty years ago!

(He lunges with his sword. Quasimodo hurries backwards, yelling as he stumbles and grabbing the edge of the scaffolding. Frollo grins, stepping on Quasimodo's hand. He cries out in pain, moving his other hand to grab onto the window frame. The scaffolding creaks as Frollo leans over, his sword at the ready.)

Frollo: And he shall smite the wicked and plunge them into the fiery pit! Both of you!

(The scaffolding, however, sways as the pole comes loose, falling with a clang. Frollo reaches forward, trying to grab onto Quasimodo's torso as the scaffolding falls from under him. Esmeralda tries to reach out for him, but he's too far.)

Esmeralda: Quasimodo!

(Frollo's grip on Quasimodo slips, and he falls with a scream. Quasimodo's arms shake from the exhaustion of holding on, but he falls with a shout.)

Esmeralda: NO!!

(Quasimodo falls right along the building, close enough for Phoebus and another man to catch him a floor below and pull him back inside. Phoebus waves the other man off to help

others before checking on Quasimodo.)

Phoebus: Got you! Are you alright?

(Quasimodo nods, shaken from falling and watching Frolo fall to his death. He may not have loved or even liked the man, but he was the only person he even knew for 20 years of his life until now. Phoebus helps Quasimodo lean against the wall.)

Esmeralda, coughing a little from the smoke inhalation from before, appears in the hallway. She rushes to Quasimodo and Phoebus, looking at them worriedly.)

Esmeralda: Quasimodo?

Phoebus: He's okay. Just a little shaken, I think.

(Quasimodo looks up sharply at Esmeralda's voice, reaching for her hand and holding it in his.)

Quasimodo: Are you alright? I— I thought you were dead...

(His voice cracks on the last few words. Phoebus glances at the two of them before stepping back to give them some privacy. Esmeralda smiles sadly, moving to lean on the wall next to Quasimodo, still holding his hand.)

Esmeralda: I'll be okay. Should probably rest for a few days, but I'll live. What about you?

(She leans over, stroking his cheek gently just above a small cut and examining his injured fingers. He shrugs — he's had worse before.)

Esmeralda: Well, I think you could do with some first aid and rest as well. Do you have anything for cuts in your room?

(She turns to leave, but Quasimodo hasn't moved, her hand still in his.)

Esmeralda: What?

(Quasimodo hesitates nervously, looking away as he pulls himself together. Phoebus grins at him from the end of the hall, giving him a thumbs up. The gargoyles outside the window next to him wink and do the same.)

Quasimodo: I— I love you, Esmeralda.

Esmeralda: I love you too, Quasimodo.

(Quasimodo looks up at her brightly, grinning. He steps closer to her, leaning in a little as he's seen the couples do in the streets below him. But he pauses, checking to make sure it's okay.)

Quasimodo: Can I—?

(Esmeralda grins, nodding as she leans in, threading her fingers through his hair.)

Quasimodo wraps an arm around her waist, kissing her gently.

A moment then—)

Phoebus: *(teasingly)* Alright, alright!

(Quasimodo and Esmeralda step back, though Quasimodo's arm is still around her. His face is slightly pink. Phoebus steps over, congratulating them.)

(Cut to the next morning — The citizens of Paris and Roma alike bustle around the square, running errands and cleaning up after yesterday. Esmeralda and Quasimodo stand in the doorway of the cathedral. He looks a little nervous, but he kisses Esmeralda, holding her hand as they step outside together. As they leave the building, people stop, staring at Quasimodo. He notices, tensing a little. Esmeralda squeezes his hand, getting his attention as they walk.)

Esmeralda: Where do you want to eat? Quasimodo?

(Quasimodo glances around thoughtfully, trying to ignore the stares.)

Quasimodo: The baker's? I've always wanted a fresh croissant.

(Phoebus moves through the crowd, joining them.)

Phoebus: Hey, lovebirds! Mind if I join you for breakfast together? What are you eating?

Esmeralda: *(teasingly)* Morning, "sun god". We're getting croissants.

Phoebus: *(groans in delight)* Yes! Warm croissants for breakfast — definitely worth the wait. And don't think I didn't catch that jibe at my name. I didn't choose it.

Quasimodo: *(relaxing, laughing a little and joining in the teasing)* But you didn't change it either.

(Phoebus laughs, nodding as he leads the way, chattering on and on with them. The crowd loses interest slowly, resuming their daily activities.)

Clopin: SO...

HERE IS A RIDDLE YOU NEVER CAN GUESS

SING THE BELLS OF NOTRE DAME!

WHAT MAKES A MONSTER, AND WHAT MAKES A MAN?

SING THE BELLS, BELLS, BELLS, BELLS...

WHATEVER THEIR PITCH, YOU CAN HEAR THEM BEWITCH YOU,

THE RICH AND THE RITUAL KNELLS,

OF THE BELLS OF NOTRE DAME!

(A long pullout, as we see Quasimodo, Esmeralda, and Phoebus step inside the bakery. We continue to pull out, until the entire city is in view. Fade to black. The end.)

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Footnotes

¹ For the purpose of rewriting the script, I referenced a transcript found online (Transcripts Wiki, 2021).

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³ "Gypsy" is only used in the context of the time period's ethnic oppression.



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