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Honors Thesis

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"This dreadful web": Alienation and Miscommunication in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*

At both the literal and metaphorical center of Victor Hugo's 1831 novel *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* is a curious interaction concerning a spider, a fly, and archdeacon Claude Frollo. He is distracted from a discussion of alchemy with visitors to his cell-like laboratory in the Notre Dame cathedral by the sight of a fly becoming trapped in a cobweb and the spider beginning to eat it. One of his visitors reaches out to save the fly, but Frollo catches his arm in an iron grip and cries, "do not interfere with the work of Fate!" (Hugo 268). He then confuses his guests by waxing symbolic about this "universal symbol" of the fly desiring only the light, the fresh air, freedom, and knowledge and instead being caught in the web of fate, desire, and pride. His guests think he is identifying with the fly by being struck down by the spider of fate in his search for scientific enlightenment, but Frollo and the readers understand that he is also the spider ensnaring the gypsy¹ dancer Esmeralda in his web of desire and obsession.

This metaphor does not apply only to Frollo. The novel hinges on the idea of fate and characters being caught up in situations and fantasies that seem to be out of their control.

Esmeralda is the fly caught in Frollo's web, and yet her beauty and allure attracts and ensnares

¹ I thought about whether to use this word because some in the Romani or Roma community view it as a slur. I've decided to use it in place of Romani or Roma because Esmeralda is not Romani by birth and it is the term Hugo uses in the novel to describe Esmeralda and her community.

him in turn. Quasimodo is ensnared by Esmeralda's beauty but also by society's perceptions of him. The characters in *Hunchback* are so caught up in the webs of fantasies and perceptions spun by themselves or society that they can no longer communicate effectively with others, resulting in alienation from the very society in which they are caught.

The seemingly ironic universality of people feeling alienated from mainstream society did not prepare me for the difficulty sociologists and philosophers have in defining the concept. I did not expect for there to be disagreement or dispute on the definition of alienation in the sociological world. Ian Williamson and Cedric Cullingford in their article "The Uses and Misuses of 'Alienation' in the Social Sciences and Education," attribute this disagreement to debate over whether alienation is a sociological process or a psychological state, or even both (263). Irving Louis Horowitz suggests in his 1966 article, "On Alienation and the Social Order," that alienation "implies an intense separation first from objects in a world, second from other people, third from ideas about the world held by other people" (231). What I took away from these essays and the novel is that the most common way to be alienated from society is to be unable to communicate efficiently with other people in it, whether that is a sociological process, like difference in class, gender, or race, or a psychological state, such as an antisocial nature or a discomfort in certain social situations.

Hugo explores these definitions of alienation in his characterizations. Sometimes this alienation is obvious, as in the case of Quasimodo, the main character who lends his name to the English title of the book. Hugo writes that Quasimodo is "cut off forever from the world by the double fatality of his unknown birth and his deformity" (Hugo 143), and his hunched back, knock-knees and superhuman strength and agility strike fear into the hearts of the common populace of Paris. Since Quasimodo cannot communicate with them, they turn him into a

monster. Quasimodo cannot correct them since he never really learned to communicate with people outside of the church, and he does not really want to because for as long as he has known he has been hated and ridiculed and derided for being “other.” He turns to the statues in the cathedral for society because the stone saints and kings cannot laugh at him and the gargoyles were just as monstrous as he: “The saints were his friends, and blessed him. The monsters were his friends, and protected him” (146). This finding society in inanimate objects goes against the first part of Horowitz’ definition of alienation. Quasimodo can claim objects as his friends and society because they are simple and easy to understand, but people and philosophy are more complicated for him to wrap his mind around and besides, “human speech meant nothing but mockery or curses” (146). His extreme ugliness separates him from the people of Paris who jeer and deride him at all times out of fear and disgust. His entire world is the cathedral of Notre Dame, and the opening Festival of Fools scene is the he only time he ventures out into Paris without being accompanied or ordered to do so by Frollo or Esmeralda.

This intimacy between Quasimodo and inanimate objects is strange, and it extends beyond the stone statues of the saints and gargoyles to the bells he is in charge of ringing. From early in his childhood, Quasimodo had an affinity for the bells of Notre Dame. The first time he pulled on a rope and set a bell ringing, “he seemed to Claude, his adopted father, like a child whose tongue is loosed, and who begins to talk” (144). Frollo is the one who made Quasimodo the bellringer of Notre Dame, and that turns out to be a blessing and a curse. Right from the start, Hugo equates the bells with a surrogate for speech or regular communication for Quasimodo, but the language Hugo uses to describe Quasimodo’s love for the bells is so interesting. At one point, he explains that even though the bells made Quasimodo deaf, “mothers often love that child best which has caused them most pain” (147). This implies a maternal love, but Hugo describes

Quasimodo's ecstasy when a full peal is rung in language that is passionate and sexual. Hugo writes that "the frenzy of the bell seized him; his look became strange; he waited for the passing of the bell as a spider lies in wait for a fly, and flung himself headlong upon it" (148). Apart from the sexual undertones of this description, it is actually the first instance of the spider and the fly symbol Quasimodo's adopted father will expound upon about 120 pages later. Quasimodo is facing off against the bells, one of the reasons he is caught in the spiderweb of alienation, and by riding the bell and becoming one with it, he becomes the spider himself.

One of the tragedies in *Hunchback* is that, while ringing the bells becomes Quasimodo's greatest joy, it also makes him deaf, thus "[shutting] off the only ray of joy and light which still reached Quasimodo's soul" (145) and cementing his alienation from the outside world. His appearance has already alienated him, and his deafness only adds insult to injury. After Quasimodo goes deaf, his main communication with other humans is through "a language of signs, mysterious and incomprehensible to everyone else" (150) except for Frollo. Hugo never goes into much detail describing this sign language, but he makes it very clear that Frollo is the only person Quasimodo can communicate with at the beginning of the novel. He also makes it clear that Frollo is Quasimodo's whole world, and he is devoted to Frollo "as no dog, no horse, no elephant, ever loved its master" (151). Frollo was the first person to take pity on Quasimodo when he found him abandoned outside of a church, adopted him and raised him as his son. Frollo saved Quasimodo, gave him everything he's ever needed, and Quasimodo can never repay him. He is just another fly caught in the archdeacon's web.

However, Frollo does not really adopt Quasimodo out of the goodness of his heart. He is raising Quasimodo as a form of spiritual collateral for his own brother, Jehan, who is a lovable rascal. Frollo's relationship with Quasimodo examines the difference between caring for

someone and caring about someone. Frollo cares for Quasimodo by sheltering him, and teaching him to read, write, and speak, but Hugo writes that “his speech was usually brief, harsh, and imperative,” (150). Even in arguably his closest relationship, Frollo does not communicate with Quasimodo as an equal. Here we have an alternate version of Frankenstein’s Creature – a novel published just 13 years prior with similar themes of alienation regarding what makes a monster and what makes a man. Unlike Victor Frankenstein, Frollo chooses to care for and educate his “monster” but does not socialize or love him or provide him with the close familial bond so important to Victor. Quasimodo and the Creature are both sensitive, philosophical individuals caught in the webs of deformity that makes social acceptance impossible, resulting in their alienation from the society they so desperately crave.

Like his adopted son, Frollo has struggled with alienation almost his entire life, but his alienation is a psychological state rather than a sociological process. While Quasimodo is trapped in the spiderweb of society, Frollo could very easily fit in to society, and does when it benefits him, but he chooses to alienate himself. Hugo writes that Frollo’s relationship with his parents was tenuous at best, because almost from infancy he was destined for the clergy. He was at school more than at home, but he valued learning more than making friends. Hugo writes, “He never shouted at play, took little part in the riotous frolics of the Rue du Fouarre, knew not what it was to ‘[deal out blows and pull out hair,]’ and had no share in the mutiny of 1463” (139). Thus, voracious learning was Frollo’s only outlet for his passionate personality, and he learned with an insatiable appetite. He was the first person through the school doors on Monday mornings and sat directly opposite the professor in his canon law lectures, “armed with his inkhorn, chewing his pen, scribbling on his threadbare knee, and in winter blowing on his fingers to keep them warm” (139). By 16, Frollo could argue theology with the experts, and by 21, knew

Latin, Greek, Hebrew and of course French, and had the same training as a church lawyer and a medical doctor. Compared to his colleagues, Frolo was an unparalleled success.

But for someone who speaks four languages, Frolo cannot communicate effectively with others. Frolo focuses so much on learning at school that he never learns how to socialize with regular people. His advanced learning also alienates him from regular people because most people cannot even read. Also, by learning everything “allowed” by such a young age, he had no choice but to turn his insatiable passion for learning to studies that were considered unholy or sacrilegious, specifically alchemy. We know that alchemy is the forerunner to chemistry, but in its infancy, it was still the search for turning lead into gold, which came to signify the transfiguration of material substance to divine, immortal life and bordered on sacrilegious. All this knowledge and thirst for learning turned the public’s perception of Frolo from an incredibly learned man to that of a sorcerer. And his association with Quasimodo does not help that. People see the hunchbacked bellringer as Frolo’s familiar or doppelgänger. To them, Quasimodo is a physical manifestation of Frolo’s profane scientific inquiries, and they mock the pair mercilessly whenever they walk together. Hugo writes that “Quasimodo was too deaf and Claude too great a dreamer to hear them” (158). This quote highlights the duality of perception and deafness represented in the pair: Quasimodo cannot perceive the insults and Frolo merely does not. Quasimodo’s deafness is literal, and Frolo’s is metaphorical.

Frolo’s training as a priest teaches him to keep his passions bottled up, and he has a lot of passion to keep bottled up. Denied the love of his family from an early age, like the Creature and Quasimodo, Frolo makes his faith and science his mistress and devotes himself to their study. Hugo writes, “He was taught to read in Latin; he was trained to look down and speak low” (139). But when his parents die and leave behind a baby brother, Frolo suddenly has the

opportunity to direct his love at another human for the first time ever. And because he is incapable of doing anything by halves, he tries to be the best mother and father to little Jehan that he can possibly be. But Jehan grows up to be the complete opposite of his brother, pursuing the society that Claude avoids as passionately as Claude pursues his intellectual studies. He still loves his brother dearly and is shown to be incapable of refusing him anything. But while Jehan is the master of communication and expression, archdeacon Claude repress and alienates himself from his emotions until they come bursting out in pages upon pages of eloquent monologues.

Frollo's alienation is partly theological. Williamson and Cullingford describe the origins of the term in theology where it describes Adam and Eve's banishment from Eden and thus humanity's alienation from God (264). Frollo can certainly relate to that. His self-professed love for Esmeralda goes against everything he's ever stood for, and he knows it. In their final encounter, Frollo pleads with Esmeralda yet again to understand how his love for her has alienated him from everything he's ever loved. He says, "what a desperate desertion of myself! A scholar, I scoff at science; a gentleman, I disgrace my name; a priest, I make my missal a pillow of foul desires, grossly insult my God!" (454). This self-desertion emerges in Twining's analysis as a second phase of alienation: once negatively defined, an individual can either establish new relations where they have control and meaning, or they can become estranged from not only society but also themselves. (Twining 425). Since Frollo is already so caught up in the webs of learning and religion, he cannot establish new relations where he has control and meaning when he is also caught in the web of desire for Esmeralda. He is already a fairly important priest, and he consults with other scientists and even the king of France at one point (168), and even they find him somewhat of a mad scientist because of his interest in alchemy. So, when he flies into the web of desire for Esmeralda, he tries to throw himself back into his

studies and re-establish those relations, but he finds he cannot. His obsession has ensured his alienation from his original passions, but he cannot reconcile it within himself.

This estrangement from oneself is Frollo's reaction throughout the novel. He is constantly trying to separate himself from his actions and attraction to Esmeralda. He says, "if a man love a woman, it is not his fault" (Hugo 454), and "I ceased to be my own master. The other end of the cord which the demon had fastened to my wings was tied to his own foot" (Hugo 315). He blames God, he blames the devil, he blames Esmeralda, he has to alienate these wicked sinful thoughts and deeds from himself to maintain his self-image of a righteous man. But that is an intentional failure of communication that cannot last forever. In the chapter entitled "Delirium," Frollo cannot stand to see Esmeralda hanged and literally runs away "from Nature, life, himself, man, God, everything" (344). He runs until he can no longer see "that odious Paris, when he could imagine himself a hundred leagues away in the fields, in a desert, he paused, and it seemed as if he breathed again" (341). This is Frollo's dark night of the soul, and it is his lowest point mentally. By loving Esmeralda to the point of madness and murder, Frollo has alienated himself from the laws of Nature and God – in short, everything he's ever loved.

The irony in this chapter is that while Frollo is trying to maintain the fantasy that he is estranged from his actions, he actually examines his life up to this point and instead of alienating his sinful and evil thoughts, "as he yielded to them he felt himself giving way to Satanic laughter" (342). He cannot alienate the sinful and evil part of him anymore that caused the death of the woman he loves and the damnation of his eternal soul, and the realization of this drives him to delirium. Even when he calms down enough to return to the city, "his fever, his mania, had attained such a degree of intensity that the external work had ceased to be to the unfortunate man anything more than a sort of Apocalypse, visible, tangible, terrifying" (349). He has

succeeded in outrunning society; his overwhelmed mental state is making the metaphorical and spiritual alienation for which he believes he is destined a reality.

This chapter is entirely from Frollo's point of view, but Hugo employs free indirect discourse to tell us what Frollo is thinking without making the readers privy to his direct thoughts. He only starts to speak again when he regains control of his sanity and has to return to Paris. This removed style of narration highlights the interiority of Frollo's character and in a sense alienates the reader from the character. The only person Frollo can truly talk to is himself, but we as readers never hear precisely what he thinks to himself. Instead, we get Hugo's free indirect discourse telling us what Frollo is thinking and feeling. This allows Hugo to not only communicate what Frollo is thinking but also comment on the inconsistencies and breakdowns in his delirious logic. It also saves him from trying to find the right words to properly illustrate the spiderweb of madness and delirium in which Frollo is caught.

For his part, Frollo is constantly trying to find the right words to say to Esmeralda to make her love him, or in a particularly desperate and moving moment, "Do not tell me that you love me, only tell me that you will try" (455). He tries to make her understand twice, first in the oubliette where she is waiting to be hanged, then in the dead of night at the base of the gallows where she will ultimately be hanged as the sun rises the next morning. These two interactions are intensely emotional scenes of a man begging the woman he thinks he loves to at least try to love him in return even though he's ruined her entire life. In the first scene, Esmeralda has twenty individual lines. Frollo speaks almost uninterruptedly for seven pages, explaining, entreating, trying his hardest to make her understand what loving her has done to him. But she responds only with her lover's name, seeming to know that this is what will hurt him the most.

Up until this point in the novel, we've watched Frollo watch Esmeralda on multiple occasions, and she dismisses his insults with "it is that ugly man!" in her first scene (63). But they do not speak face to face until this moment. In this interaction, Frollo and Esmeralda both the spider and the fly, and the webs are their fantasies of their respective beloveds. Frollo never sees Esmeralda as a living breathing real person with thoughts of her own. He does not let her participate in the "conversation" at all and repeatedly tells her to be quiet. He is so caught up in his fantasy of her that possessing her is a foregone conclusion in his mind, and if he cannot talk her into giving herself up to him, he will take her by force.

And for Esmeralda's part, Frollo is never more than a specter who haunts her and kills her beloved Phoebus. She does not even recognize him immediately in the darkness of her oubliette, and they never address each other by name. Frollo destroys Esmeralda's entire life and she only ever knows him as "the priest." Esmeralda is so caught up in this spiderweb of fantasy centered on Phoebus, her beloved captain of the guard, that, even when it is clear that he will not love her the way she fantasizes, Esmeralda never gives up her love for him. Ultimately, this inability to escape this spiderweb of fantasy destroys her. She is hiding from the guards trying to hang her, she hears Phoebus' voice and calls out for him to rescue her, even though she's seen him with his fiancée and he has told her she is not serious to him. But she tries to communicate with him anyway, and it is too late; he is not there anymore to hear her cry for help, and she is lost.

Frollo's second attempt at talking Esmeralda into accepting his advances goes much the same way: Frollo goes on and on while Esmeralda listens in silent horror until he begs her to speak "One word of kindness, - but a single word!" (455). But this time, he is not as loquacious. He says to her, after only a page of monologue instead of seven, "I can find no words to express

my feelings; and yet I pondered well what I should say to you ... I give way at the decisive moment” (454). Frollo truly believes that if he can just find the right combination of words, Esmeralda will take pity on him and try to love him. But he cannot talk his way out of obsession and into her heart. In both instances, Frollo thinks communication is failing to convince Esmeralda of his love because she will not listen, but in fact it is Esmeralda for whom communication is failing because he will not listen when she rejects him. He demands she listen to him and be silent, and never once does he consider that she will reject him.

Frollo’s complete inability to conceive of Esmeralda rejecting him indicates how much his upbringing as a priest has separated him from the realities of interacting with women and society. He barely knew his mother, and as a man he actively avoids women, turning up his collar when they pass in the street or petitioning against a princess visiting Notre Dame (156-7). Frollo’s literally cloistered and austere upbringing means he never comes to terms with or learned to handle his sexuality and thus hates women for how they make him feel. This makes Frollo’s inability to interact with women the most influential aspect of his character in the novel. He has been training to be a priest his whole life, and, “from disposition as well as by profession” (156), he treats women as beacons of sin and temptation that will send him to hell. He does not see women as people or equals, so when he is explaining to Esmeralda in her prison cell how much he loves her, he tells her how “a woman’s form” would make him thrill and he hated it (313). He only sees women as bodies, as objects of desire and temptation. When he first sees Esmeralda, his repressed sexuality collides with his hatred of women and gypsies and explodes into a passionate obsession that will destroy him, her, and at least four other named characters – not counting the people who died in the siege of Notre Dame.

The siege of Notre Dame is the largest-scale example of breakdowns in communication resulting in different parts of society fighting each other en masse. The poet Pierre Gringoire, at the request of Frollo, has organized the vagrant community to stage a rescue mission to get Esmeralda, their most beloved member, out of the cathedral. Thus, the oppressed people are rising up and challenging the established and powerful symbol of religion's power in society. Their leader, Clopin Trouillefou, makes an impassioned speech at the doors of the cathedral demanding the Esmeralda's release. But Quasimodo, who is standing guard, of course hears none of it and thinks they have come to hang Esmeralda. So he attacks the very people who are trying to save the woman he adores and starts the battle. Word of this disruption get all the way to the king, who orders his soldiers to quash the vagrants and hang Esmeralda. Thus, the political and military arm of society swoops in like spiders to keep the vagrants in the web. But Quasimodo rejoices when he sees the soldiers run off the vagrants because he thinks they've come to save Esmeralda. He even shows them all the hiding spaces in the church, not knowing that had she still been inside she would have been lost. Quasimodo is so caught up in his desire to protect Esmeralda that he would have unwittingly delivered her to the spiders, and so many people of Paris – including Frollo's younger brother, Jehan – die because of a breakdown in communication.

With so many parts of society fighting to decide her fate, one would think that Esmeralda could not be alienated from society. And yet, Esmeralda has an interesting relationship with alienation. She is a member of the gypsy community, so by definition she is an outcast from "normal" society. Yet the people of Paris love her, but only to a certain extent. They applaud her dancing and simple tricks with her goat, but have no trouble believing her capable of witchcraft and murder once she is accused. They see her much the same way they see Quasimodo, as an

interesting spectacle, but greet her with joy and laughter instead of fear and jeers because of her beauty.

We learn about Esmeralda's history through her "husband" and Frollo's student and friend, Pierre Gringoire – whom I will return to in greater detail later. She's lived with the gypsies under leader Clopin Trouillefou her entire life, and her travels throughout Europe "made her conversation as motley a piece of patchwork as her dress, half Parisian and half African" (246). This motley conversation brings up a lovely instance of breakdowns in communication. Esmeralda is as wonderful a singer as she is a dancer, and in her first incarnation on the page she sings in Spanish, a language unknown to both Gringoire and herself (64). Thus, her singing is full of joy and freedom from care, but the lyrics talk of terrifying figures on flags and Arab horsemen with swords and crossbows (65). It's a little moment, but it's the first instance in the novel where language impedes communication.

This moment also shows that she is not as integrated in her own society as she seems. "Esmeralda" is a Spanish word meaning "emerald," but she and Gringoire think it is a gypsy word that comes from the green bag she wears around her neck (99). Later on, we learn that bag holds a shoe that will reunite her with the mother she was stolen from, thus also learning that Esmeralda was not born into the gypsy community but rather stolen into it. And while the gypsies love her almost to the point of veneration, she is still an outsider there as well.

The identity of Esmeralda's mother is a small plot point brought up in the very beginning of the novel, but it comes back in a big way by the end. Esmeralda tells Gringoire that there are only two people in Paris who do not like her: a priest who frightens her and a recluse who curses her. The priest, of course, is Frollo, but the recluse is a woman called Sister Gudule but named Paquette who has walled herself away from society in a cell with one window and no doors to

mourn the loss of her baby daughter 16 years prior. Like Frollo, she has chosen to physically alienate herself from society, but as penance for losing her daughter. When we are first introduced to her, she is silently staring at the baby shoe that is all she has left of her daughter, but later in the novel she spends a little over a page praying aloud for God to return her daughter to her. ““Restore her to me for a day, an hour, a single instant – one instant only, Lord! – and then cast me to the devil for all eternity!”” she begs (322). And yet she never seems to miss an opportunity to scream at Esmeralda through the one window of her cell and knows what is happening to her throughout the novel. She tells Frollo that ““Every time that young viper passes my cell, my blood boils!”” (324). She thinks it is hatred, but in fact she is just misunderstanding God answering her prayers. Right after her impassioned prayer, she learns that they are going to hang a gypsy girl, and she is at her window ““with the sudden leap of that spider which we saw rush upon a fly when her web quivered”” (323). Even in her self-imposed alienation, Paquette is drawn to Esmeralda, but she is so ensnared in her sorrow and deafened by her hatred of gypsies that she does not realize God is answering her prayers and giving her daughter back to her.

Frollo uses Paquette’s visceral reaction to Esmeralda to his advantage. Like delivering a fly to a spiderweb, Frollo leaves Esmeralda with Paquette so he can go tell the soldiers looking to hang Esmeralda where to find her. But then Esmeralda tells her that she is missing her mother like Paquette is missing her daughter, and Paquette realizes that God had been listening all this time. ““That is why my heart leaped within me every time you passed,”” Paquette tells Esmeralda, ““and I thought it was hate!”” (460). Her daughter has returned, and all her curses turn to blessings. She physically breaks down the wall of her cell and pulls her daughter to safety, covering her with kisses and saying the same things Frollo had just been begging for – kiss me, I love you – but from a mother, these words are a blessing and not a curse.

But Esmeralda is too ensnared in Phoebus' web and, before Paquette can stop her, she destroys their safety by calling out for him when she hears his voice. When they are discovered, Paquette tries every method of communication available to her – lying, pleading, bargaining – because she has lost her daughter once and will not lose her again. But all of her attempts at communication fail, so she abandons trying to communicate and relies on physicality. She first blocks the opening, then when they pry Esmeralda out, she just holds and kisses her daughter until she is forced away. She makes one last attack, “without a cry” and “maintain[ing] a profound silence” (474), but she is killed silently from a blow to the head, communication having failed her and her daughter entirely.

But let us turn from the woman who died trying to let Esmeralda know she was loved to the man who abandoned her to Frolo and the noose: Pierre Gringoire. Like Esmeralda, he finds himself both part of and apart from both societies in Paris. He is a poet and playwright, which means he has no job and an education that makes him think more highly of himself than the common people of Paris. And when they abandon his play and him to the freezing January streets, he follows Esmeralda back to the Court of Miracles and attempts to talk his way into the gypsy community, saying “I do not see why ... why poets should not be classed with vagabonds” (85). He is unsuccessful and is almost hanged for his trouble before Esmeralda saves him by marrying him into the community. But even then, he of course does not fit in completely there. There's a reference to him right before the siege of Notre Dame where the Court of Miracles is in an uproar getting ready to rescue Esmeralda, and Gringoire, who organized the whole campaign, is sitting alone, staring silently into the fire (387). I found this striking because, while he is normally an onlooker (since he at times is an audience stand-in) this time he is alienating himself from the action entirely.

Gringoire may be alienated from society, but he still is never without an audience: himself. Hugo writes that Gringoire, “like all true dramatic poets, was given to monologues” (60). Gringoire talks to himself all the time and I truly believe it is what keeps him from being negatively affected by his societal alienation. He does not need other people’s society – and indeed he forfeits it altogether in the end and runs off with the goat, abandoning Esmeralda to Frollo’s dire mercy – he only needs himself.

Other characters indulge in this soliloquizing, but for different reasons and with different outcomes. Paquette talks aloud to her lost little daughter, but since she only has the little shoe, she’s basically talking to herself. We get to hear this pitiful sorrow of a childless mother because it makes her emotional reunion with Esmeralda at the end that much more impactful, because of the ironic comparison to how she curses Esmeralda throughout the novel until she learns her true identity. Jehan Frollo also talks to himself because he is constantly communicating and, like Gringoire, finds society wherever he goes even if it is only himself. His brother also talks to himself, but only when Jehan – and the reader along with him – is listening. Claude’s talking to himself seems to be only for the reader’s benefit, since Hugo employs free indirect discourse when we experience a scene from Claude’s point of view and never hear his direct thoughts. His thoughts seem to be for himself alone, but even then, he does not always listen to himself.

But Jehan’s eavesdropping on Claude reveals a small moment that symbolically represents Frollo’s alienation from his former loves. Jehan is going to Frollo’s laboratory in Notre Dame to borrow money, but he lingers by the door to listen to his brother talk to himself while trying to engage himself in scientific study. Claude Frollo reads aloud: “‘A woman’s name should be agreeable, soft, fantastic ... it should sound like words of blessing.’ Yes, the sage is right, - indeed, Maria, Sophia, Esmeral – Damnation! Again that thought!” (Hugo 257). Maria is

Latin for Mary, the mother of God and representative of Frollo's duties and love for his faith. Sophia is Greek for wisdom, representing Frollo's ardent love of science and learning. But the one that derails his study so much so that he cannot finish speaking is Esmeralda, the Spanish word for emerald. However, neither Jehan nor Frollo know this meaning. Jehan only knows it affects his brother, and Claude Frollo only knows it as the name of the woman he loves. This name, meaning an earthly valuable in a language not studied by learned men, reinforces Esmeralda's otherness and Frollo's alienation from his faith and his scholastic endeavors due to his obsession over her.

All the characters I've mentioned so far have been alienated from society not only due to failures in communication but also due to their appearance, profession, or ethnicity. It is easier for the people of Paris and Frollo, or those spiders of society, to prey on Esmeralda and Quasimodo because they can separate themselves from the gypsy and the hunchback and see them as flies in their spiderweb. Other characters, like Phoebus de Chateaupers, captain of the royal archers and the object of Esmeralda's undying adoration, and his fiancée, Fleur-de-Lys de Gondelaurier, do not have to worry about alienation from society due to their nobility and social standing. But that does not mean they are safe from failures in communication. When we first are introduced to the happy couple, Fleur's mother has to keep prodding Phoebus to go over and talk to Fleur, and they have the same conversation over and over since he is incapable of whispering sweet nothings to her like a lover should (230). Hugo explains that Phoebus has spent so much time in the saddle that his noble upbringing has been rubbed off by the soldier's life of the camp and the tavern, and he's loved so many women that there's very little love in him left for Fleur (232). So even if Phoebus isn't alienated from society, he is uncomfortable in it, and this

inability to communicate effectively with Fleur has alienated the supposed lovers before their marriage has even begun.

However, Phoebus can communicate perfectly with Esmeralda. When Fleur-de-Lys has him invite Esmeralda into her house, Phoebus aligns himself with Esmeralda over his fiancée. He speaks to her easily and charmingly in direct contrast to the stilted, awkward questions he aimed at Fleur-de-Lys earlier. And that does not go unnoticed. Fleur-de-Lys is furious and says “He speaks to that creature in her own tongue!” (237). Fleur’s use of “creature” instead of “girl” or even “gypsy” emphasizes how she sees Esmeralda as other, alien and below her not only in social rank but also even in humanity. She cannot stand being shown up by Esmeralda, and neither can the other women in the room. Hugo describes them as “elegant greyhounds, hanging ... around a poor wood-deer” (237), but the image of the spider and the fly also springs to mind. The women align against Esmeralda immediately and without needing to speak. Hugo writes, “The instincts of women read and reply to one another more rapidly than the understandings of men” (235). There is no breakdown or failure in communication here, just spiders in a web doing what spiders do when a fly is trapped.

But no character is as perfectly in tune with society as young Jehan Frollo, Claude’s beloved younger brother. He is the first character we meet, and right off the bat he has talked his way into our hearts with his antics. Jehan is a master communicator who seems to be constantly talking and observing and interacting with the people of Paris and the other characters. He takes on the role of the voice of the people of Paris at times, specifically the opening scene when they’re waiting for Gringoire’s play to begin and in Quasimodo’s trial scene. Like I mentioned earlier, Jehan talks to himself almost constantly, but unlike Gringoire, Jehan is able to talk his way out of and into basically any situation. He has no trouble spinning a tale of contrition and

mixing in all the languages he knows to appeal to his archdeacon brother in order to get more money, and when Claude sees right through that Jehan tells the truth without shame (263). And when he finally is ostracized from his brother's good graces, Jehan abandons Parisian society and joins the vagrants, receiving a much warmer welcome than Gringoire did. The irony of Jehan and Claude's last conversation is that there is no communication happening at all. Jehan is talking his brother's ear off because he is used to having come up with excuses for money, but he comes up against nothing. The usually loquacious Claude only responds with "Well?" because he has long since stopped caring about anything but Esmeralda. Even Jehan's threat to turn vagabond is met with no initial objection, though Claude does throw a purse of money at Jehan after he leaves because Claude cannot refuse his brother anything, even when the spider of his obsession has ensnared him in its silk and he can no longer resist.

The only time Jehan is unable to rely on his communication skills to get him out of trouble is when he faces off with Quasimodo in the siege of Notre Dame. It does not even cross Jehan's mind to try and make Quasimodo understand the gypsies sacking the cathedral are trying to rescue Esmeralda from being hanged. He only sees Quasimodo as his brother's deformed and deaf slave, tries to kill him, and when he realizes his defeat, he sings "with the bold unconcern of a lad of sixteen" as Quasimodo strips him of his armor and bashes his brains out (410). Frollo sees this happen, and he blames Esmeralda for making him love her to the point of abandoning his beloved brother and setting in motion the events that led to his blood on the stones of the cathedral. Even as he takes responsibility for Jehan's death, saying "Cain, what hast thou done with thy brother?" he still makes it her fault, saying, "it was because of me, because of this woman, because of her –" (454-455). He repeats that last phrase even after his voice dies away until he faints with the exhaustion of trying to reconcile his guilt and his blame.

Almost every character is in some way alienated from part or all of the society they live in due to an inability to communicate effectively, resulting in what Horowitz calls an “intense separation” from people in society. Esmeralda does not understand the “gypsy” languages she sings and is alienated from her own history. Phoebus cannot hold a conversation with his fiancée. Frollo is too educated to relate to the masses and too passionate to relate to his fellow priests or scientists. This “intense separation” resulting from failures in communication is on display in comedic fashion in Quasimodo’s trial scene. Quasimodo, as we have established, is deaf, and he is being tried for attempting to kidnap Esmeralda. However, he does not know the judge presiding over his case is also deaf, and the judge does not know that the defendant is deaf. So, the judge asks Quasimodo questions and gets no response, but continues to ask until the whole courtroom is laughing. The judge believes Quasimodo has elicited this response with some jest and calls the provost for assistance. But Quasimodo responds to the provost’s questions with seemingly unrelated answers, and the court is once again interrupted. Both men here are too deaf to know what everyone else knows, and in that sense we as readers are always wiser than the characters. Communication is failing and breaking down at almost every point, and it’s objectively hilarious.

But this comedy of errors and miscommunication has real consequences for Quasimodo. The provost, also unaware of Quasimodo’s deafness, believes himself to be mocked and sentences him to be tied to the public pillory, whipped and then left exposed to all the jeers and torment the people of Paris can inflict upon him. The provost thinks himself the center of the universe, which is how everyone sees themselves in their own fantasies – the one exception is Esmeralda, who has Phoebus at the center of hers. This is as intense a separation as one can ask for. Quasimodo is put up on a pedestal for all of Paris to see as an example of someone who is

different and other and alienated from society. The people of Paris may not realize that breakdowns in communication led him to this point, but they do not care. Hugo writes, “There was hardly a single spectator in the crowd who had not – or did not think he had – grounds for complaint against the malicious hunchback of Notre-Dame” (221). This is just one occasion where the people of Paris are caught up in a group fantasy of being better than people who are other, with disabilities or customs they do not understand. This is the paranoia of a mob, or of the Klan, and it spins a web of hatred and fear.

No one realizes the irony of Quasimodo being publicly humiliated in the exact same place he was hailed as the Pope and Prince of Fools only one day earlier (218); they only see the silent monster they’re accustomed to hating. And then Hugo gives us a list of all the insults flung at him especially by the women in the crowd. The women are not named, but they – along with Jehan Frollo – become the voice of the common people of Paris. But while those insults literally fall on Quasimodo’s deaf ears, their meaning is clear in their faces. Hugo’s indictment of the audience’s treatment of Quasimodo could seem to include the reader in that audience. But unlike the people in that audience, we cannot change their actions through our words or deeds since we are not there, and in a sense, we are just as alienated from that society as Quasimodo.

The people of Paris from which most of our characters are alienated do not let their voices be silenced. Jehan is often the voice of the people, but often Hugo includes the conversation or jeers of the crowd. William Graham Clubb writes that these minor characters use archaisms, dialectisms, and Latinisms “to evoke the everyday speech of 1482. This vast, turbulent and motley historical matrix was intended to lend authenticity to a story of epic grandeur, and with customary energy Hugo immersed himself in documents for the task, remaining sufficiently faithful to his sources, ... to have won fulsome praise for his

reconstruction” (Clubb 2). The society from which our main characters are alienated is actively letting those characters know when they are welcome and when they are not, and even if Quasimodo, Frollo, and Esmeralda to an extent were capable of interacting and communicating with the people of Paris effectively, it would not matter.

Quasimodo bears all the insults and condemnation the people of Paris throw at him with rage and hatred instead of shame, because shame is based in societal constructs, and “He was too far removed from the existing state of society, and too nearly allied to a state of nature, to know what shame was” (222). But Frollo does. Quasimodo recognizes his beloved father and master as Frollo enters the square riding a mule – just as separated from society as Quasimodo, but where one is separated by crimes, the other is separated by his holy profession – and Quasimodo thinks Frollo has come to save him. But Frollo turns his back on his adopted son and abandons him to the rabble of Paris “as if in haste to avoid humiliating appeals, and very far from anxious to be greeted and recognized by a poor devil in such a plight” (222). Quasimodo is trying to call on the only society he’s ever known for aid at the same instant that Frollo is trying to distance himself from an integral part of his identity, and that moment of simultaneous welcome and rejection plants the first seeds of rebellion in Quasimodo’s mind. These seeds will grow throughout the novel and come to fruition in the final chapters where Quasimodo rejects Frollo as he did here and pushes him off the top of Notre Dame after Esmeralda is hanged.

But just as Frollo and Quasimodo are separated from society, Esmeralda is as well. She is part of the gypsy community, and thus does not fall into the same norms as the Parisian mob. She is not the only one to hear Quasimodo’s cries for water, but she is the only one who listens. She is the only person who can join him on that pillory so intensely separated from society because she too is separated from society. Quasimodo sees the crowd part to let her approach him,

physically distancing themselves from her to highlight their separation. At first, he does not understand why she's come; he thinks she has come to "be avenged, and to take her turn at him with the rest" (224). But instead, Esmeralda gives Quasimodo water and pity and in return receives his undying love. Hugo gives us this moment in free indirect discourse from Quasimodo's point of view – another parallel to his master and adopted father. Hugo describes Esmeralda's actions and only speculates at her thoughts but describes what Quasimodo is thinking and how he feels about her actions. As in Frollo's "Delirium" chapter, we are not privy to Quasimodo's exact thoughts, perhaps because "the ideas which traversed it came forth greatly distorted" (146) and would be to tempt miscommunication between the reader and the character. In any case, this interaction is entirely wordless, but this silent connection between outcasts is one of the successful scenes of communication in the novel.

By giving Quasimodo that fateful drink of water, Esmeralda is establishing a new relation, much as Twining suggests. They join one another in this moment. For Twining, there are five aspects of the concept of alienation: "powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, social isolation, and self-estrangement" (Twining 419). Powerlessness is evident in Quasimodo's inability to change his physical form, but nowhere does it seem to be such a defining characteristic as it is in Esmeralda. She rarely makes a decision for herself; most events happen to her. She does choose to marry Gringoire and save him from the gallows, she chooses to give Quasimodo water when he is on the pillory, and she does choose to go into the de Gondelaurier house and then the 1482 equivalent of a sleazy motel to see Phoebus, but these can be seen as empathetic gestures rather than acts of agency or empowerment. But she is almost kidnapped, she is tortured, she is convicted of murder and witchcraft, she is rescued, she is almost raped, she is rescued again, and then again, and then trapped, caught, and hanged. She seems to be so

passive she's barely a fully fleshed out character. We even hear her backstory in an almost third-hand way: we hear Gringoire tell it to Frollo, and who knows where Gringoire heard it. Even when Hugo writes that she is talking to herself, we do not get to hear it like we hear every other man talk to himself. She is so rarely allowed to speak for herself, and when she does it's mostly the name of her beloved Phoebus. Esmeralda seems to be alienated from her own story.

However, this innocent, naïve girl of sixteen who has a much more idealized view of the world than her noblewoman counterpart Fleur-de-Lys is more than just a passive object of beauty and desire. Esmeralda weathers every insult the recluse Sister Gudule throws at her from behind the bars of the cell she is walled up inside. Esmeralda never quails in front of Fleur-de-Lys and her gaggle of friends when they gang up on her to politely insult her. And she pushes back against Frollo every time he tries to convince her to love him by words or by force. In one instance after Frollo has attempted to rape her and she's called Quasimodo to rescue her, she snatches the knife Quasimodo offers to Frollo and threatens Frollo with it, crying "You dare not touch me now, coward!" (372). While her first response is to ignore the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, Esmeralda has it well within her power to fight back when the need arises.

This moment in the cathedral is one of the only moments in the novel where we experience the action from Esmeralda's perspective. Before this, Hugo includes her in the narrative through the eyes of the men who desire her or the women who envy her. This is comparable to the rarity of women's and people of color's perspectives in traditional historical narratives and the tendency for those male writers to reduce them to stereotypes or broad generalizations. In the rare occasions where a scene is from Esmeralda's point of view, Hugo again employs free indirect discourse to maintain power over how we interpret her narrative. By presenting Esmeralda predominantly through the male gaze, Hugo makes her into a paragon of

virtue and a stand-in for Mary, mother of God. William Graham Clubb questions this characterization of Esmeralda since her mother was a whore and her father a mystery, saying “For our time it seems unlikely that this genetic inheritance and upbringing could have brought forth such a model of purity of mind, heart and body, but the concept of bright flowers, even butterflies, springing from a dung-hill was dear to Romantics generally and to Hugo in particular” (Clubb 5). I would argue that Hugo makes it clear that Esmeralda’s status with the gypsies was that of adoration right from the beginning (206), and their veneration and her patronage by their leader Clopin Trouillefou would be enough reason for them to protect her from the evils of the world (246). And Gringoire tells Frolo that, everywhere Esmeralda goes, people “loved her for her gaiety, her gracefulness, her lively ways, her dances, and her songs” (247). In other words, she is so beautiful she is universally adored, which makes it easier for society to accept her despite her gypsy upbringing. This is an inversion of how the people of Paris treat Quasimodo. Her otherness is part of her aesthetic appeal, so she is welcomed, and his otherness results in aesthetic repulsion, so he is cast out.

However, welcomed does not always mean accepted, as we have seen with Esmeralda’s interaction with Fleur-de-Lys, and Esmeralda’s beauty cannot protect her from the justice system. Esmeralda’s entire experience with the justice system is one of guilty until proven guilty. She is accused of murdering Phoebus during a romantic encounter – witnessed by a hidden and wildly jealous Frolo – and “that enchanting dancer who had so often dazzled the passers-by with her grace – was nothing but a horrible witch” (298). The judges and people will not believe her when she says she is innocent but instead ask her why she persists in her denial. She holds fast to the truth as long as she can, but once they resort to torture to get the “truth” out of her, “her life thus far had been so joyous, so sweet, so smooth, the first pang vanquished her” (302). This is

the ultimate breakdown in communication. She tells them anything and everything they want to hear because “it was plain that she was utterly broken” (303) from the torture. She believes that the man she loves is dead, and without Phoebus, she just wants to die.

A dark shadow of Quasimodo’s trial earlier, this court is a travesty of justice and broken communication because the man Esmeralda has supposedly murdered is actually alive. Frollo stabbed Phoebus when he could no longer sit by and watch this handsome scoundrel make love to the woman of his dreams, and in his jealous rage thought he killed him, but Phoebus just snuck away to his regiment. Once he recovered enough, he returns just in time to watch Esmeralda be hanged for his murder. From her elevated position on the cathedral steps, Esmeralda actually sees him standing on the balcony with Fleur-de-Lys, separated from the mob who have come to see an execution, and she cries out to him to save her. But just as Frollo turns his back on Quasimodo on the pillory, Phoebus abandons Esmeralda to hang for his murder.

While her pleas fail to convince Phoebus to rescue her from the ultimate alienation, Quasimodo returns the favor she granted him on the pillory, multiplied tenfold. In an inversion of the first time Quasimodo and Frollo try to carry Esmeralda off, communication does not fail Quasimodo as he snatches Esmeralda from the hangman’s noose, pulled her safely in the church and cried out in a tremendous voice “so rarely heard by any one, and never by himself ... ‘Sanctuary! Sanctuary! Sanctuary!’” (340). And in that moment of clear communication, Quasimodo is breaking through all the societal, physical, and communication barriers as “he confronted that society from which he was banished,” (339) and turned the people of Paris to his side.

Esmeralda is safe from the outside world, but she has now taken on Quasimodo’s form of alienation since she cannot leave the cathedral without losing her sanctuary. In this way “She

was even more cut off from the world than Quasimodo” since he is able to leave the cathedral, and he becomes “the only tie, the only bond, the only means of communication left to her with mankind, with the living” (359). All her former means of communication have been broken or failed, and she is left with only her goat and the deaf, hunchbacked bellringer she can scarcely look at. His appearance shocks and frightens her and she cannot thank him when he brings her his own food and bed. He understands that his appearance makes her uncomfortable and stays out of sight, but he gives her a whistle that only he can hear in case she needs him. Unlike the jeering crowd, eventually “she made an effort to overcome the aversion with which he inspired her” (355) and she seeks out his company. Their first conversation is an awkward mix of signs, lip reading and speech, but they can understand each other.

Quasimodo’s tongue which Frollo worked so hard to loosen and was bound again by the bells is once again freed by Esmeralda’s presence. Quasimodo, the deaf man whose speech up until then had been monosyllabic or one sentence at best, speaks more than she does and is suddenly as eloquent as Frankenstein’s Creature². Quasimodo’s arguments may not be as well read, but he composes a poem imploring her to “Heed not the face/Maiden, heed the heart” but lamenting that “Beauty alone has right to live/Beauty can only beauty love” (366). He gives her two vases of flowers: one of beautiful crystal with withered flowers and one of plain earthenware with fresh and thriving flowers. He is his adopted father’s son – dramatic and loquacious and given to symbolism. But Esmeralda never fully gets used to him, and he cannot break through that web of fear to overcome the distance between them.

²The Creature makes sophisticated philosophical arguments about the morality of Victor creating him without planning to care for him or even make him a companion, as well as identifying first with Adam and then with the rebellious Satan in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.

The most heartbreaking example of a character in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* being alienated by a failure in communication is after Esmeralda has been in the cathedral for some time. While she does not treat Quasimodo unkindly, it still is obvious she does not like to be around him. But on this occasion, Quasimodo approaches her seemingly with that air you have when you need to talk to someone but are afraid of what they'll say:

“‘Listen to me,’ he said with an effort; ‘I have something to tell you.’ She signed to him that she was listening. Then he began to sigh, half opened his lips, seemed just about to speak, looked at her, shook his head, and retired slowly, pressing his hand to his head, leaving the gypsy utterly amazed” (360).

With every detail Hugo describes, we know, we feel, we are certain that Quasimodo is going to tell Esmeralda he loves her. And unlike the other two men who have told her the same thing, he is the only one who means it. Frollo thinks he loves her, but he has no thought to her happiness or autonomy. Phoebus is attracted to her, but he thinks no more of her than any other prostitute or woman he's slept with. But Quasimodo thinks only of Esmeralda's happiness, and she is listening, looking at him, ready for whatever it is he is going to say. But right as he is about to speak, he sees how beautiful she is and remembers how ugly she finds him, and words fail him as he loses all resolve and hope of being loved in return. The web of his perceptions of himself and fantasies about her is too strong. Quasimodo is unable to tell her he loves her, which cements his alienation and leaves him heartbroken, her confused, and the reader overcome with emotion.

I was caught in the web of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* at an early age. I remember watching it as a kid – probably at my grandmother's house and probably on VHS. I remember loving Esmeralda's dresses and being afraid of the figures in red hoods during one of the musical

sequences. And then I watched it again as a middle schooler and understood a lot more. Disney's *Hunchback* is fueled with the fires of sexual desire – literally. Villain Judge Claude Frollo sets most of Paris ablaze in search of Esmeralda the gypsy dancer because of his obsessive passion for her. Quasimodo realizes that Esmeralda will not return his love, but still helps her at every turn and is happy when she and Phoebus end up together. The good man gets the girl in the end, but the words “I love you” are never spoken by any character in the film.

While the movie is, in my opinion, the darkest Disney film and tackles the themes of religious conflict, xenophobia, racism and alienation found in the original novel more directly than one might expect from a movie marketed primarily for children, it is still a Disney movie and cannot end tragically. Sweet and innocent Esmeralda becomes an advocate for social justice, and, through Quasimodo and Frollo, we learn that what makes a monster and what makes a man is often decided by what lies beneath the exterior façade. When I learned that it was based on a novel, I read it immediately and was ensnared even tighter in Hugo's web.

I've revisited the story in book form but also various movie and stage adaptations over the past decade, and a theme I've discovered in my re-readings and re-watchings is alienation. Almost every character in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* is alienated from society through either breakdown or failure of communication. I was also surprised that alienation was so hard to define in sociological terms. I expected this, in my view, common sociological sentiment to be well studied and defined, but I was unprepared for the discussion on whether it is sociological, philosophical, psychological, or just plain too vague to be defined. I took the definitions I found and, hopefully, used them accurately in my analysis of the characters in *Hunchback*.

I was also surprised when I set out to write this that, in the almost 200 years Victor Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* has been around, there's so little criticism on the

characters in the novel. Most of the criticism I found focused on the cathedral itself, or Quasimodo if anything. To me, the characters and Hugo's characterizations are what make the novel so interesting and captivating. I was fascinated enough to take my introductory knowledge gained from the Disney film and compare it to the source material, and then to other film and stage adaptations, and compare and contrast the characters in each iteration.

In the 1939 film version of *Hunchback*, which the Disney film drew on for inspiration almost as much as the original text, a conversation between Frollo and Esmeralda in the cathedral is included but is not present in the original novel. This added conversation takes different forms in different versions and presents a different power dynamic between the two. In the 1939 film version, it is a quietly insidious discussion of faith and nature where Esmeralda wants to believe Frollo is a good person while he stares openly at her breasts when she isn't looking. Frollo has the power here because, while he does not want to get caught ogling her, he is playing into her fantasies of what makes a person good, and she comes very close to thinking him a good man. In the 1996 Disney version, it is a violently quiet attempt at domination where Frollo twists Esmeralda's arm behind her back and whispers in her ear how she cannot escape or defy him – which she promptly does by elbowing him in the stomach and calling him out on his true desires. This is a very literal example of Frollo the spider catching Esmeralda the fly. Again, Frollo has the power since he physically restrains her, but she challenges his power by throwing him off her. The 2014 stage musical adaptation of the Disney movie takes a middle ground – Esmeralda challenges Frollo's bigotry and intolerance and he responds in the sleaziest way by suggesting they could learn from the other. Here is the most balanced power dynamic between the two. Frollo does not dominate but Esmeralda does not let him dominate her and he allows for

an exchange of ideas. In each case, this added conversation adds to their characterization and establishes the tone of their relationship, but it is entirely false to the novel's spirit.

At the end of the movie, Quasimodo has rescued Esmeralda and the rest of the captured and oppressed gypsies, defeated Frollo by sending him plunging into the fiery pit of sin, bigotry and racism, and is hoisted up onto some Parisians' shoulders and paraded into society as a hero by the whole city. No one is alienated, and the children's movie ends happily ever after. But because communication fails or breaks down for the characters in Hugo's novel at every turn, they cannot overcome their alienation. Phoebus and Fleur cannot find anything to talk about, so they are fated to a marriage based in alienation and miscommunication. Frollo cannot talk Esmeralda into loving him, and in the end alienates himself from his faith, his studies, his brother, everything he's ever loved. Esmeralda cannot convince Parisian society to treat her as a person and not merely a beautiful but ultimately foreign stranger and dies abandoned and alone. Quasimodo cannot convince society or Esmeralda to look beyond his physical appearance and, after shoving his beloved master from the top of the cathedral and leaving him to fall to his death, abandons his world of Notre Dame to join Esmeralda in death.

The last chapter of the novel is called "The Marriage of Quasimodo" and describes how two intertwined skeletons are found many years after the end of the events in the novel. The male skeleton is clutching a female skeleton, and when the people who discovered the pair try to separate them, the male skeleton crumbles into dust. Hugo never explicitly states that Quasimodo joins Esmeralda and dies cradling the last of everything he's ever loved, but it is clear all the same. But what he is clear about is that Esmeralda gets no such comfort. Her mother is dead in the square in front of her. Phoebus has utterly abandoned her. Quasimodo, who has tried so hard to save her, is out of reach up at the top of Notre Dame with Frollo, who has tried so hard to

make her love him and only succeeded in sending her to her death. Esmeralda dies alone and alienated from everyone she loves or who loves her, and Quasimodo finds death is the only way to transcend the spiderwebs of society.

Some characters in Victor Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* are alienated by choice, and some characters are alienated due to circumstances out of their control. But in the end, they are all just flies caught in the spider's web of society, fantasy and perception, and no amount of talking is enough to stop the fateful spider from devouring them whole.

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