**Victor Hugo’s *Notre-dame of Paris* contrasted with the Disney adaptation:**

This analytical essay contrasts Disney’s *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* with the original 1831 Victor Hugo novel, *Notre-dame of Paris*. Although the Disney movie is inferential from Hugo’s novel regarding the shared main cast of Esmeralda, Frollo and Quasimodo, they both differ in plot structure and complexity, themes, conventions, and stylistic and language features. These reflect the divergent contexts of both texts, illustrating how the creators utilised language features, stylistic features and conventions in representing ideas, perspectives and aspects of culture to influence their audience.

The novel and movie differ regarding the expression of their purposes. Firstly, Hugo wished to inform his audience, eighteenth century adult book-readers and politicians, about France’s gothic-era architecture, which experienced rampant modernisation during the 19th century Beaux-arts architectural movement. The novel’s very title, *Notre-Dame of Paris*, centralises the gothic-era Notre-Dame as being “of Paris”, accentuating its integral role as a symbol of the city’s history, and present. Within the novel, Hugo illustrates clear disdain for Beaux-arts architecture, stating:

“[what has man] given us in exchange… for all this Gothic art? The uncouth, surbased arches of M. de Brosse, the clumsy architect of the great door of Saint-Gervais – so much for art.” (pg3)

Hugo expresses his purpose through extensive and emotive descriptions of Parisian landmarks. Such as the Palais, where Hugo constantly reminds his readers to; “picture to himself that immense, oblong Hall under the wan light of a January morning… and he will have some idea of the scene as a whole” (pg2). Through guiding his audience’s imagination towards these gothic landmarks, Hugo attempted to raise awareness, and communicate his idea of preservation. However, Hugo’s societal views are dichotomous, in one case looking back to preserve gothic architecture, and in another looking to progress ideals regarding the marginalisation and mistreatment of Gypsies. Hugo’s Gypsies are representative of other historically oppressed groups, such as African Americans or Jews, shunned by the social majority due to being perceived as alien, or abnormal. This is exemplified during Esmeralda’s first dance, where a man initially calls her “a goddess.” However, upon discovering her Gypsy status, that man rescinds, stating “Why, no, ‘tis a gipsy!” (pg37). Hugo’s thorough development of Esmeralda’s character within the novel was an attempt at undermining this idea of the other, through demonstrating her clear and relatable human aspects, such as fear towards Quasimodo, and heartache at Phoebus’s betrayal. By doing so, Hugo sought to incite self-reflection regarding his target audience’s racist ideologies, through educating them that those ethnicities which they perceive as alien, and therefore mistrust, are as human as themselves. In these aspects, Hugo sought to incite change within his contemporary society. Comparatively, the Disney movie sought to teach its child audience simple moral lessons regarding the contemporary societal issues of true-heroism, racism and sexual misconduct. For instance, Quasimodo, a malformed and despised human, is a non-traditional hero. Whereas conventional heroes are both physically and morally perfect, hence being unachievable role-models for children, Quasimodo possesses numerous character flaws due to Frollo’s upbringing. However, through his intelligence and kindly nature, Quasimodo still overcomes adversity. Therefore, the movie’s creators utilised the flawed character of Quasimodo as an achievable role-model for its child audience, to demonstrate true-heroism. Furthermore, the movie teaches its child audience that racism and sexual misconduct are immoral by negatively portraying them through Frollo, who, within the novel’s beginning, was clearly revealed as villainous upon killing Quasimodo’s mother, and attempting to drown her baby. As most children are raised believing murder to be evil, they instinctually identify Frollo as being evil. Therefore, when Frollo later displays his racist ideologies towards gypsies, and his sexual misconduct towards Esmeralda, the child audience automatically associate these actions as being the actions of a villain. Hence, the Disney movie effectively teaches its child audience simple moral values. In contrast with Hugo’s novel, the Disney movie expresses its purpose more successfully, as in comparison Hugo’s moral lessons are less simplistic, and therefore require deeper consideration from his adult audience to understand.

Both texts utilise the villain character of Claude Frollo to adhere to their audience’s capabilities, add meaning to their religious themes, and subvert societal conventions regarding the portrayal of villains. Hugo’s Frollo possesses numerous inter-woven motivations, being portrayed as a broken, but also caring man. Having lost his parents to plague, Frollo fiercely protects his orphan brother Jehan, loving him with “a sense of infinite compassion” (pg86). This love was then directly extended to Quasimodo, his adopted son, whom he found as a baby, lying orphaned near a statue of Saint Mary. In contrast, Disney’s Frollo was a harsh, cruel and proud man, who only protected Quasimodo because he believed that “this foul creature may yet prove one day to be of use to me.” The diverging complexities of these two characters are indicative of how both texts adhered to their audience capabilities. Hugo’s educated adult audience enabled him to craft a morally grey villain, as they could better understand Frollo’s complex motivations. In contrast, the Disney movie was limited by its child audience’s naïve perceptions towards right and wrong to creating an unquestionably villainous antagonist. This displays how audience capabilities were followed to make meaning; the movie’s child audience would be unable to fully comprehend Hugo’s Frollo, whereas the novel’s adult audience would likely find the movie’s Frollo overly straightforward. However, an observation of critical theory’s principles regarding Frollo demonstrates a disruption of traditional genre and era representations of villains, done to add meaning to their themes. This is exemplified through Frollo’s ideologies towards Catholicism within both texts. Victor Hugo’s Frollo, although initially a priest, began turning astray after his brother Jehan started hating him, which “[shook] his faith in human affection” (pg93). Hugo represents Frollo’s denouncement of religion through his advancement “into the [outer, immoral] arms of science” (pg93) with necromancy and witchcraft. These perverted his mind, fuelling his avid fixation upon the attractive gypsy girl Esmeralda. Hugo’s decision to make Frollo a member of the church inverted traditional villain roles of his era, which were based upon the conventional Devil of Catholic faith. Through this, Hugo undermined the Catholic Church’s then conventional assertions of virtue, by demonstrating to his audience that even supposedly upright figures, whose task is to cleanse sins, are fallible. Similarly, the Disney movie foregoes traditional Disney portrayals of Christianity, through providing nuanced and valid criticisms of clinging to deeply-ingrained religious ideologies, such as those of Claude Frollo. Although the movie’s Frollo never directly denounces Catholicism, he is portrayed as being able to “sense corruption anywhere, except within”. His hypocritical ideology is clearly displayed through the Hellfire scene, where he struggles to rationalise his lust for Esmeralda, a Gypsy, whose race he regards as pure evil. Here, instead of altering his ideology regarding Gypsies to match his feelings for Esmeralda, and thereby grow as a human, Frollo rather seeks to explain these feelings through his pre-existing ideological lens. Through this convoluted thought process, he concludes that, even though she is Gypsy, if Esmeralda marries him she can be “saved from the fires of this world, and the next”, finally stating “be mine or you will burn.” The movie’s creators attempt to communicate this information understandably to their child audience within the Hellfire scene by expressing his religious ideologies through song and visual elements. However, the subtler hypocrisies of Frollo, such as his decree to break Notre-dame’s religious laws of sanctuary, are most likely too complex. In contrast, the novel’s intricate religious themes are targeted more effectively towards its adult audience, as some of the movie’s themes are likely too subtle for its child audience to successfully understand. Therefore, although both texts successfully invert traditional representations of villains to add meaning to their religious themes, the novel likely achieved this more effectively.

The language features and structure of both texts differs to appeal to and identify with their individual audiences. This is exemplified through the divergent expressions utilised by characters within each text. Victor Hugo’s novel transpires within France during the late 1400’s, when Catholicism was enforced, and the masses were generally uneducated peasants. Character dialogue reflects this, through religious expressions such as “by my soul”, or “the devil fly away with you all.” Similarly, outdated vocabulary, indicative of the 1400’s, was utilised in describing mundane objects, such as the word “pillory” for stocks. Hugo utilises this dialogue to contextualise his novel, and aid in audience immersion. In contrast, the Disney movie modernises the dialogue between characters, who utilise western phrases and slang, such as “hey” and “dangit”. This modernisation of the character’s dialogue occurred to better appeal to the movie’s target Western child audience, as the complex, mediaeval language utilised within the novel would likely confuse the movie’s audience. These texts are also dissimilar in their usage of language structure. Victor Hugo’s novel, for instance, intersperses sequences of poetic-prose between the usual dialogue and prose sequences. This poetic-prose is mostly used in describing characters or locations, through utilising detailed and emotive imagery, and parataxis. The novel first utilises detailed, emotive imagery to describe the Palace of Justice, by asking “the reader’s permission” in immersing them within its setting. The novel describes “the dull roar in our [the reader’s] ears, and a dazzle in our eyes” (pg2), before illustrating the structure and history of this Parisian landmark. It emotively describes the travesty of negligence, which has caused the illustrious “tall, pointed windows… [of] a thousand colours”, and the blue-gold walls to become “somewhat tarnished… [coated] with dust and cob-webs” (pg2). Through this, Hugo effectively communicates his purpose of architectural preservation, by increasing his audience’s emotional link to the gothic Parisian buildings. Likewise, Hugo initially utilises parataxis in detailing the movements of the crowd within the Palace of Justice, rapidly switching between describing their “shuffling of feet”, to their “coughing and blowing of noses.” This parataxis enables Hugo to exude the crowd’s restlessness from within the text’s structure, and thereby subconsciously increase the reader’s restlessness. In contrast, the Disney movie largely follows a normal movie script format, with characters interacting through direct dialogue. However, unlike Hugo’s novel, the movie’s characters often break into song, with a definable rhythm and rhyme. Song is mostly used to explain to the audience, in a rapid and entertaining method, a character’s emotions and motivations. Such as Quasimodo’s “Out there” where he sings about joining the outside world, or Esmeralda’s “God save the outcasts”, where she sings a desperate prayer for gypsies in need. Songs are also used to resolve character quandaries, such as Frollo’s “Hellfire”, where he confronts his feelings towards Esmeralda. These songs aid in expressing the story’s plot to the movie’s family audience in an entertaining way, without the sole usage of dialogue. Thus, the audience’s understanding of the characters and plot is e developed, increasing their involvement with and enjoyment of the movie. Although both texts utilise language and stylistic features effectively in increasing audience enjoyment, Hugo expertly utilised parataxis and immersive imagery to influence the audience’s subconscious perception of his text.

Both Victor Hugo’s *Notre-dame of Paris* and its Disney adaptation, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, utilised societal conventions, language features and stylistic features to represent ideas, perspectives and aspects of their culture. Through doing so, both texts sought to influence their individual audiences, and thereby aid in the expressing of their purposes. Hugo aimed to incite audience introspection upon their racial and architectural ideologies, through increasing awareness regarding contemporary issues within his society. In contrast, the Disney movie sought to teach its child audience various simplistic moral lessons regarding contemporary societal issues. The movie was more successful in communicating its comparatively simplistic purpose to its child audience than the novel was to its adult audience. However, Hugo’s inverting of genre and era conventions to add meaning to his novel’s themes was more successful, as he better identified these themes towards his primary audience. Likewise, Hugo’s expert usage of language and stylistic techniques elevated his novel artistically above the movie.

*-1986 words*