

Beauty without Wisdom from Esmeralda: Another Dimension under the Principle of Comparing Beauty and Ugliness in Notre Dame de Paris

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Abstract. In the French literary giant Hugo's work *Notre Dame de Paris*, Esmeralda is a prominent female protagonist who has also left an important mark in literary history. Her stunning appearance and pure, lovely heart deeply attracted the male protagonists Quasimodo, archdeacon Claude, and captain of the guard Fibbs. However, there is a soul deficiency in the body of this beautiful woman, that is, beauty without wisdom. This made her unable to distinguish good from evil, to see the beautiful soul beneath Quasimodo's ugly exterior, and to see the frivolity beneath Fibbs's handsome face. The soul deficiency represented by Esmeralda's unintelligent beauty makes Quasimodo's sincere devotion to her become an illusion. This, coupled with her death at the end, gives the readers a sense of great tragic emptiness.

Keywords: Notre Dame de Paris; beauty without wisdom; principle of beauty and ugliness contrast.

1. Introduction

Esmeralda is a beautiful, pure, and kind female protagonist carefully shaped by Hugo in *Notre Dame de Paris*. Her otherworldly appearance and helpful qualities have made her regarded by critics and readers as the embodiment of the truth, the good, and the beauty in Hugo's works. As for the analysis of the "principle of contrast between beauty and ugliness" in the novel, it often starts from the comparison of beauty and ugliness between her and Quasimodo and the good and evil between her and Claude and Fibbs in mind. It can be clearly seen that Esmeralda basically occupies the center position in the traditional character comparison system, and her character image can be said to be flawless compared to others.

While I don't want to deny the analysis of Esmeralda's personal image and her important position in the novel. However, Esmeralda cannot discern the kindness under Quasimodo's ugly appearance, and she cannot see the evil inside Fibbs when she is faced with his handsome appearance. This lack of moral dullness and judgment makes Esmeralda a heart-blind woman, and her beauty is, therefore, more limited to the physical level, showing the characteristics of "intelligence".

2. The contrast between Esmeralda's physical beauty and her soul deficiency

From the beginning, Esmeralda appears to the reader with an extraordinary beauty: beetle-black hair, sparkling eyes, tiny dancing feet, and a charm that "makes everyone fix their eyes on" [1], even Hugo himself could not help but praise her as "a truly magical creature."

When she appeared in the piazza, all the theatergoers were riveted by her. With the cry of "La Esmeralda is coming here," all the people in the hall seemed to be under a spell, running towards the windows and climbing up the walls to see the beauty, shouting her name in unison; Gangova, who did not know what was going on, came to the campfire and the crowd, and was immediately captivated by Esmeralda's dazzling sight that he "could not tell at a glance whether she was a human, a fairy, or an angel"[1]; On the other side of the crowd, among the thousands of faces illuminated by the firelight, the archdeacon Claude stared intently at the Bohemian girl, his deep eyes sparkled with a strange youth, a passionate life and a profound passion[1] -- Esmeralda had stirred up a desire he had buried in his heart for years; In the night, Fibbs, the captain of the guard, saved Esmeralda from danger. After a brief conversation, Fibbs couldn't help but lean in to kiss her.

All these reflected the beauty of Esmeralda's features and the depth of her charm. Under the author's description, her physical beauty has become the object of love and desire for several men.

Of course, Esmeralda's beauty is not limited to the surface. Under her beautiful face, there is also a kind heart, with the innocence and romance that belong to a maiden. At the critical moment when Gangova was pushed to the gallows by the beggars, Esmeralda, the girl who was followed by Gangova in the night, resolutely stood up and saved him in the form of marriage; Quasimodo was tortured for pillaging the girl in the square, and he called out to the onlookers for water, but all he got in return was vicious insults. Esmeralda, the victim in the case, squeezed out of the crowd and gently poured water into Quasimodo's cracked mouth. That such a beautiful, bright, pure, charming, delicate girl could have been so kind as to run to the aid of the one who had hurt her! How innocent, honest, and kind she was!

However, such a girl with a beautiful appearance and a pure soul, showed an eye and heart blind state in the face of "love".

Fibbs, the captain of the guard who used to flirt with beautiful women in bars and hotels, began to confuse Esmeralda with seductive words since he met her, as he had done with other girls. Starting by constantly showing his affection towards her, he then lured her in the excuse of love. Fibbs even used the moral kidnapping of "if you don't let me have it, it means you don't love me" to make Esmeralda compromise. Seeing this, I believe that most readers have seen the true face of Fibbs -- a love liar who covets beauty. But Esmeralda didn't realize it, Fibbs is just as brave, handsome, and charming as she first saw him. So when Fibbs pulled away, she was so frightened that she thought she was going to lose her love that she put aside the amulet of her mother and her own chastity[2], saying, "Take me! Take me whole! Do whatever you want, I belong to you now. Amulet is nothing to me! My mother is nothing to me! You can be my mother, because I love you!"[1]

Esmeralda's kind and pure nature often led her to be easily deceived by others. Despite her good intentions, she lacked the discernment to see through people's true motives.[3] This was evident in her relationship with Fibbs, as she failed to recognize his dissolute and conceited nature. Her infatuation with his handsome appearance clouded her judgment, causing her to overlook his ulterior motives. Even after being abandoned by Fibbs, Esmeralda continued to long for him, oblivious to the harm it caused Quasimodo, who had silently protected and cared for her. She naively sought out Quasimodo's help in finding Fibbs, unaware of the pain it caused him.

Esmeralda's inability to distinguish between genuine love and mere physical attraction ultimately led to suffering for both herself and Quasimodo. Her lack of wisdom prevented her from seeing the truth about those she trusted, leaving a trail of heartache in its wake. These actions in fact reflect her moral obtuseness and verify her lack of wisdom[4] and soul deficiency.

3. The contrast between Quasimodo's outer ugliness and his inner virtue

Quasimodo is undoubtedly the most physically unattractive character in the book. His appearance is a grotesque combination of various deformities, which make him an object of fear and revulsion for those who encounter him: his scruffy red hair seems to have a life of its own, standing upright on his head. There is a quad-shaped nose below, while his mouth resembles a horseshoe. The tiny left eye under his red eyebrows is extremely disproportionate to the right eye, which is completely covered by a large tumor, not to mention the rough mouth with big ivory teeth, a forked jaw, the hunched back between his shoulders, the fat feet and terrible hands [1]. Despite his outward appearance, which arouses fear and revulsion in those who see him, Quasimodo's inner heart is full of truth, goodness, and beauty. His gentle nature and kind heart are evident in his actions, as he selflessly devotes himself to the protection of the cathedral and its occupants---Esmeralda.

Quasimodo's senses are not very keen, but he has a very clear sense of judgment.

When the judge sentenced Esmeralda to be hanged in the square for intentional murder, he realized that the innocent girl was going to be executed. He didn't believe the slander and speculation about

her but used his clear mind to distinguish right from good and evil. In order to protect justice and the woman he loves, Quasimodo rushed to the square alone and saved Esmeralda from the gallows.

After Quasimodo takes Esmeralda into the sanctuary of the church and ensures her safety, he does not follow in the footsteps of Archdeacon Claude, who is infatuated with her beauty and attempts to fulfill his desires through forceful means. Instead, Quasimodo's love for Esmeralda was a quiet, selfless, and patient one. He dedicated himself to taking care of her basic needs, tending to her meals, ensuring she had sufficient food and appropriate clothing, all the while respecting and understanding the essence of who she was as a person.

When the beggars attacked the cathedral, he used stones, wood, and other materials to make weapons against them. He alone could resist thousands of troops and horses, and his bravery was comparable to that of a knight charging into battle. When he found out that his adoptive father, archdeacon Claude, was responsible for Esmeralda's death, he made a choice between the grace of his upbringing and the killing of innocents: Quasimodo is deeply grateful to Claude for his upbringing, but this is not the reason to tolerate Claude's evil.

The actions of Quasimodo clearly showcase the admirable virtues that he embodies: wisdom, integrity, restraint, and bravery. He possesses a keen awareness and mastery over good and evil, allowing him to differentiate between them in any situation, thus consistently acting in a virtuous manner. This wisdom, together with his unwavering commitment to doing good, serves as the foundation of his character. Quasimodo's heart is pure, his soul is whole, and his image is reflected in the courageous actions he takes to stand up for what is right.

Esmeralda has little contact with Quasimodo. It was her compassion that drove her to bring water to the chained bell ringer, but she couldn't hide her fear. However, after being brought into the church by Quasimodo, the two characters had more direct contact in their time alone together. It is here that the "contrast between beauty and ugliness" takes on a new dimension.

Readers will forgive Esmeralda if she brought water to Quasimodo in the square out of sympathy rather than awareness of his kindness because Quasimodo at that time left a psychological shadow on her during the night's looting. But after being rescued from the gallows by Quasimodo into the church, Esmeralda still has a strong fear and loathing of him, which is blind to his beauty and kindness.

She was often so afraid of his ugliness that she "unconsciously covered her eyes with her hands." [1] Although Quasimodo took good care of her and did not offend her in the slightest, Esmeralda still had a deep loathliness for the poor hunchback: "She could not stand that bell ringer no matter what. He was too ugly." [1] She was never able to ignore Quasimodo's ugliness, and even when he brought her a food basket and a pitcher, she needed to "try not to be too disgusted." After all, Esmeralda judges people by their appearances. The only person she cares about is the handsome Fibbs and is not grateful at all to the bell ringer who takes care of her.

When her hopes of meeting Fibbs failed, she blamed the ugly Quasimodo for everything: "' You should have waited all night for him! 'she said angrily. He saw her angry look and knew it was a reproach. 'I'll wait for him longer next time,' he said, lowering his head. 'Go away! 'she told him.'" [1] Quasimodo did not appear in her view again. Esmeralda, however, was not much troubled by the poor hump's willingness to avoid him, but in her heart she agreed with him. What a blind girl she was!

It's evident that Esmeralda's evaluation of individuals is solely based on the surface. She merely perceives Quasimodo's physical ugliness and deformity, yet she overlooks the shelter and protection he offers her. Esmeralda fails to recognize Quasimodo's gentle and compassionate nature [5], which is truly lamentable due to her inadequate judgment and lack of moral acuity.

Although Esmeralda did not show friendliness to Quasimodo during the days in Bell Tower, the latter still took care of Esmeralda's feelings in every way: she did not want to see him in his ugly state, and he preferred to be mistreated by her rather than upset her, bearing all the pain himself, avoiding the girl..... Quasimodo values the goodness and purity of Esmeralda. He knows that she is innocent and should never be hanged. By protecting her, he is protecting goodness, purity, and justice. Esmeralda, however, is unable to see the virtue in him. It felt like a tragic absence.

Quasimodo has a clear ability to distinguish right from wrong, he is full of wisdom, courage, justice, restraint, and true "kindness". In contrast, Esmeralda's beauty is more superficial, and it is this "unintelligent" beauty that brings her infinite tragedy.[6]

4. Epilogue

From another dimension of the contrast between beauty and ugliness, the author finds the "unintelligent" characteristic of beauty in Esmeralda, that is, her soul deficiency. The attraction of "beauty" is in sharp contrast to the great destruction of the character's fate caused by unintelligence, which also leads Esmeralda to the end of death. At the same time, the wise Quasimodo cannot be recognized or respected, and even is hurt by her "heart blindness". The wise and the soulless die together, which inevitably brings us a great tragic emptiness.

People with complete and beautiful souls should have the ability to distinguish right from wrong, and their efforts should be matched with respect and care. The tragedy of Quasimodo and Esmeralda offers profound philosophical insights and moral guidance that warrant our deep comprehension.

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