

The Lost Daughter and The Adored Fighter

*Investigating The Representation of Gypsy Women in Victor Hugo's
Notre-Dame de Paris and Georges Bizet's Carmen*



Bachelor Thesis Literary Studies

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the representation of gypsy women in Victor Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris* and Georges Bizet's opera *Carmen* by analysing the characters Esmeralda (Hugo) and Carmen (Bizet). The perspective for this literary analysis combines notions from gender studies (intersectionality, agency), postcolonial studies (Orientalism, the Other), and the context of French Romanticism to interpret the characterisations of these women. The applied methods involve close readings alternated with broader readings of the narratives, as well as tables to concretise contrasts between characters, and a comparison of Esmeralda and Carmen to draw further conclusions about their individual representations as gypsy women. The first chapter shows how prejudices about gypsies are countered in Esmeralda's characterisation, as her magical appearance is revealed as only *seeming* magical. The importance of appearance is further underscored in the chapter as Quasimodo, who might also be viewed as an Other, is judged for his ugliness as Esmeralda is for her beauty, their appearances determining various factors in their lives. Chapter two shows how Carmen's "Habanera" about love serves as a template for her characterisation, as the free nature of love and its resemblance to a gypsy child may imply that Carmen is the embodiment of the love she sings about. Carmen and her opposite Don José have different views on love, yet seem unable to change these opinions, which causes the opera's major conflict. The third chapter compares the two gypsy women to one another and discusses Esmeralda's and Carmen's relations to the Romanticist themes of love and death, as these themes characterise their storylines. Where Esmeralda is novel to love, her execution underlining her identity as an innocent child, Carmen may resemble a bullfighter in the arena of love, acting according to her principles and prepared to die for them. From these characters two different views on the gypsy identity can be constituted, as Esmeralda's ambiguous identity might plead for an interpretation of this identity as a way of life that one can adopt, while Carmen's sharp contrast to José and the fixed nature of her character establish her more firmly as an exoticised Other. Drawing from these two texts, then, it can be argued that French Romanticism does not show one coherent image of the gypsy woman or gypsy identity, but instead might allow for polyvalent interpretations and therewith debates on this identity and on gypsy representation in this aesthetic movement.

KEYWORDS

gypsy; woman; French Romanticism; Orientalism; Other; agency; intersectionality; identity; love; death; Esmeralda; Carmen; Hugo; Bizet.

INTRODUCTION

The aesthetic movement of French Romanticism features the figure of the gypsy abundantly in its art.¹ As this marginal group in society was depicted in French Romanticist texts and those drawing from Romanticist tradition, one may wonder *how* exactly they were presented. My thesis sets out to examine specifically the representation of gypsy women in French Romanticist imagination by analysing two characters: Esmeralda from Victor Hugo's novel *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1831) and Carmen from the eponymous opera by Georges Bizet (1875), as these nineteenth-century texts arguably focus on gypsy women as a main characters and remain popular to this day.²

The perspective for my analysis draws from two theoretical fields that are used fruitfully in literary studies (which is the primary field this thesis is situated in), namely gender studies and postcolonial studies. From gender studies the notions of intersectionality and agency play a crucial role in my approach. As Esmeralda and Carmen are not only presented as gypsies, but as young gypsy women, located in particular situations and environments, an intersectional viewpoint that takes into account these social factors will help to distinguish their respective presentations. These women represent marginal groups within society, both as women and as gypsies, and could be considered as outsiders; nonetheless I argue that the agency these women show by living according to their principles and pursuing their own goals, drives the respective plotlines, and that this level of agency is partly due to their marginal status as *gypsy women*, for this status entails a different set of principles and way of life. By regarding these women as active subjects rather than only as objects of exoticist fascination, I wish to investigate the persons who continue to feature in popular cultural imagination.

From postcolonial studies I employ Edward Said's notions of Orientalism and the Other. Orientalism I understand as a discourse characterised by "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said 11), and the Other, particularly within Orientalist discourse, as the image of the Oriental opposite which bears connotations of femininity versus the masculine, Occidental Self. The classification of

¹ This thesis will make use of the term "gypsy," because this word is used in the discussed primary texts and bears connotations of a constructed image that draws from the ethnic group of the Romani as well as from ideas of (French) Romanticism and the French bohemian artists. As this image is part of the framework I address in this text, I will then make use of the term "gypsy" to refer to this constructed image.

² The opera *Carmen* bears connotations of realism (Burkholder 705), and due to these connotations one might contest it being treated as a Romanticist work. Nevertheless, the work it was based on, Prosper Mérimée's novella *Carmen* (1845), was written during the heyday of French Romanticism and exhibits traits characteristic of this movement, such as a fascination with the exotic, an aspect which, as Colmeiro argues, is taken over from Mérimée's novella in the opera's setting and music (141-42).

“gypsy” already bears connotations of the Orient, as the “cultural roots [of the Gypsy people] lie in the East” (Colmeiro 129). As Carmen and Esmeralda could be more specifically classified as Spanish gypsies, they are bound to the Orient through Spain’s “legacy of its Jewish and Moorish past” as well (Colmeiro 130). Where Carmen is unmistakably portrayed as a Spanish gypsy through the story’s Spanish setting, Esmeralda’s link to Spain is hinted at sporadically, for example when she sings “an old Spanish ballad” the gypsy women used to sing for her (Hugo 371). The notion of the feminine Oriental Other opposed to the masculine Occidental Self proves especially relevant for these stories, as both narratives centre around a female character with Oriental connotations and her relation to one or more Occidental men. Due to their ties to the Orient, gypsies in Romanticist texts often become objects of a fascinated and exoticising gaze, yet are perceived with apprehension as their implied otherness may challenge the norms and values of Occidental society. The contrasting characters of Carmen and Esmeralda and their depictions as gypsies allow for an in-depth analysis of the representations of gypsy women as Others in these French Romanticist texts.

The gendered, postcolonial perspective described above favours a twenty-first century interpretation of these characters, and indeed I would classify my interpretation as such. Nonetheless, this perspective allows me to recognise patterns from French Romanticism in both texts. With French Romanticism I indicate an artistic movement and its cohesive set of ideas as displayed in artistic texts from nineteenth-century France.³ Rather than considering this movement as a fixed time period that stretches over several decades of the early nineteenth century, I consider it in Schroder’s words as “a complex of ideas and attitudes,” whose notions may have pervaded into other movements and time periods (vii). Ideas from this movement involve a “revolt against . . . classicism” (Havens 10), a shift in the audience’s taste from “old forms of classic tragedy” to “the rapid action, the sharp contrasts, and the new subjects of the melodrama of the boulevards” (13), the phenomenon of the “Spanish drama” which featured (often inaccurately) “the Spanish local color of costume, setting, and character” (16) and finally the double focus “upon the external world and at the same time inward upon man’s human and mystical longings” (18). A final notion of importance is that of the bohemian artist, a concept which entails a way of life inspired by the wandering life that gypsies led, a lifestyle, as Pels and Crébas argue, which the bohemians romanticised and invested with their own ideals about love and art (598).⁴

³ With artistic texts I indicate for example works of literature, music, theatre and visual arts.

⁴ There is an intricate semantic relationship between words that indicate the bohemian artist and words that are used to describe gypsies—such as “bohémien” or “bohémienne,” as Esmeralda and Carmen are referred to with

These concepts from literary and cultural theory in combination with notions from French Romanticism constitute the framework of this thesis. My analysis relies on methods of close reading as well as broader narrative analyses, the use of tables to investigate and concretise contrasts between characters, and ultimately a comparative approach as I compare Esmeralda's and Carmen's depictions. The first chapter of this thesis concerns Esmeralda in *Notre-Dame de Paris*, investigating her character by analysing her introduction in the story, her overall presentation in the narrative and the way she can be defined by her opposite, Quasimodo. Chapter two takes a similar approach to the character Carmen in Bizet's opera, *Don José* featuring as Carmen's opposite. Chapter three compares Esmeralda and Carmen in light of broader Romanticist themes that can be considered essential to their storylines and characterisations, and ultimately the chapter investigates how Hugo's and Bizet's approaches to the characters' gypsy identities can be interpreted. The research question to guide my thesis is the following: how do *Notre-Dame de Paris* and *Carmen* construct the identities of respectively Esmeralda and Carmen as gypsy women?

PLAYING THE PART

CONSTRUCTING THE CHARACTER OF ESMERALDA IN *NOTRE-DAME DE PARIS*

The complex story of *Notre-Dame de Paris* is known by “[m]ost readers and audiences . . . today . . . as . . . the story of young gypsy Esmeralda on the streets of Paris,” due to both early pirate translations and more recent adaptations that underscore Esmeralda's role (Schneeweis 101). Both Schneeweis and Udasmoro argue that Esmeralda is objectified as a “sexualized object of adoration” (Schneeweis 103), Udasmoro adding that centralising gypsy women while presenting them as objects of desire “simply emphasises [*sic*] their position as marginalized objects” (29). Indeed, when Phoebus saves Esmeralda from her abductors and she is “laid . . . across his saddle” (Hugo 93), she seems to be *handled* even as a contested object; however, once the coast is clear, she sits up, asks for the captain's name, after which “she slid down from his horse like an arrow falling to earth and ran off” (94), leaving Phoebus and his men perplexed by her sudden action. As this scene demonstrates, Esmeralda does show agency in the novel, and although I will take into account Esmeralda's objectification as an exoticised Other, this chapter is concerned in the first place with analysing different facets of her identity and regarding her role in the story as a subject with agency. By analysing

the latter—and this semantic relationship emphasises the identification of the Parisian bohemians with the gypsy way of life (see Colmeiro 132), but it also shows how connotations from both groups became fused into the Romanticist image of the gypsy.

Esmeralda's introduction in the story, her role in the overall plot, and her connection to Quasimodo—another liminal figure and arguably both her opposite and counterpart—I wish to arrive at a fuller analysis of Esmeralda's depiction in *Notre-Dame*.

The story is set in medieval Paris and it is during poet Pierre Gringoire's mystery play that Esmeralda is introduced by someone who shouts "La Esmeralda [is] in the square," her name having "an effect like magic" as the audience abandons the play to see her (74).⁵ Gringoire asks: "What *is* that word, first of all? It's Egyptian!" (75, original emphasis), the scene thus introducing two aspects of Esmeralda's identity already: firstly, she is well-known by Gringoire's audience, "the townsmen and women" of Paris (31); secondly, "Egyptian" foreshadows her gypsy identity, for, as Colmeiro explains, Egypt was considered the gypsies' "original homeland . . . according to myth" (137).

Once Gringoire sees Esmeralda, he wonders "whether the girl was human being, fairy, or angel" (Hugo 82), her appearance, too, bearing magical connotations. The description of Esmeralda bundles bodily traits, clothes and accessories into one image, in which one category complements another, her "tiny foot [being] . . . Andalusian, for it looked both constricted and comfortable in its graceful shoe" while "her slender legs [were] uncovered now and again by her skirt" (82). Despite her supernatural appearance, Gringoire and the reader soon discover that she is "quite simply, a gypsy girl" (83); yet, despite the poet's disillusionment, "the scene as a whole had something marvellous and magical about it" (83). The scene of the beautiful gypsy girl who dances and sings appears magical, but is not. This paradox of appearance is woven through the narrative and plays an important part in the plotline. Gringoire considers Esmeralda "an inoffensive and charming creature" (263), who has "so rare a gift for . . . delicate tasks that in two months she had taught [her] goat to write the word 'Phoebus' with moveable letters" (264). The goat's trick, which testifies to Esmeralda's skill in training the animal, is viewed in the Ecclesiastical court as evidence of Esmeralda's witchcraft as the trick *appears* magical. The reader, however, knows that this is not magic and that accusations against Esmeralda rely largely on prejudices about gypsies, as Gringoire explains that "accusations of witchcraft [were] so frequently made against gypsy women" (264). By informing the reader that Esmeralda is not a witch, but a victim of prejudice and unfortunate circumstances, Esmeralda's characterisation questions and challenges the prejudices uttered in the courtroom.

⁵ For a summary of the plots of *Notre-Dame de Paris* and *Carmen*, please see the appendix.

Esmeralda, then, appears as a beautiful gypsy girl and a skilled performer, whose appearance seems magical. Udasmoro proposes that Esmeralda even “become[s a] [subject] because men bow before the power of [her] beauty” (30);⁶ there is another character, however, to whose characterisation appearance is essential: Quasimodo. Craven’s statement that Esmeralda in *Notre-Dame* is “twin[ned] with Quasimodo in the monstrous spectacle of their shared alterity” (226) taps into several important aspects of the relation between these characters: 1) they can both be viewed as Others 2) the extremes of their beauty and ugliness imply an aestheticism of sharp contrasts, and 3) the idea of these characters as counterparts.⁷

The binary between beauty and ugliness has more influence on these characters’ lives than one may suspect: as a baby, Esmeralda was stolen because of her beauty, while Quasimodo was likely abandoned because of his appearance. Their appearances determine therefore in what environments the children grow up: Esmeralda with the travelling gypsies, Quasimodo with Frolo in the Notre-Dame. These environments also dictate their opposite lifestyles and influence their places in the public domain. Esmeralda wanders as she pleases, is “mad above all about dancing, noise and the open air” and people love her for her “gaiety, her kindness, her lively manner, her dancing and her singing” (263). Meanwhile, Quasimodo lives chiefly in the seclusion of the church, yet people swiftly recognise him during the face-pulling contest as they “shouted as one ‘It’s Quasimodo the bell-ringer! . . . [T]he hunchback of Notre-Dame!’” (71). Where Esmeralda’s beauty earns her people’s adoration, Quasimodo’s ugliness sparks fear and spiteful gossip, as people speak of him as a ““devil,”” who ““casts spells”” and probably ““goes to the witches’ sabbath”” (71), while none of this is confirmed in the story at all. On the contrary, the narrator explains rather how Quasimodo’s ugliness and deafness cut him off from most human contact and that “his viciousness was not perhaps inborn,” as from “his earliest steps among mankind, he had first heard himself, then seen himself being jeered at, stigmatized and rejected” (166).

It is fascinating, then, that both Esmeralda and Quasimodo are famous musical performers in Paris. Esmeralda is a dancer and singer, her visibility to the audience forming an essential aspect of her performance. Quasimodo is “the carillonist of Notre-Dame” (163), whose performance is necessarily invisible but widely audible to the masses as he rings his beloved bells. Esmeralda’s and Quasimodo’s appearances, then, are determining factors in their lives, as it is due to their appearance that they grow up in other environments than they

⁶ The quote from Udasmoro’s article originally refers to both Esmeralda and Carmen.

⁷ For tables with comparisons of respectively Esmeralda and Quasimodo, Carmen and Don José, and Esmeralda and Carmen, please see the appendix.

were born in, unconsciously playing roles that have become part of their identity—Esmeralda growing up as a careless gypsy girl, while Quasimodo becomes the mocked and isolated bell-ringer of the Notre-Dame—although these identities have been forged through nurture rather than nature.

The seemingly supernatural appearances and connotations of Esmeralda and Quasimodo—the first seeming angelic, while the latter is described as demonic-looking—add to their status as Others in the story. Esmeralda can be regarded as the exoticised Other who is admired and desired, a mysterious object to a fascinated gaze. Quasimodo, meanwhile, is shunned and considered dangerous because of his exterior; yet in a way he is also gazed at with fascination, for example during the face-pulling contest when he is crowned the “fools’ pope” (70). Their exceptional appearances are regarded by people in the novel with fascination, yet they evoke different responses from the crowds. As mentioned before, prejudice is shown as a major factor in people’s attitudes towards one another. Beneath all the stark contrasts, the narration depicts nonetheless a shared humanity as it casts light on the background stories of its characters, explaining how exterior factors such as upbringing, but also (reactions to) one’s own exterior, affect the interior of a person, which reminds of the French Romanticist double focus on the external and internal world.

In this chapter I have examined how Esmeralda can be viewed as a nuanced character with a multifaceted personality who shows a degree of agency. Rather than accusing her of witchcraft, Hugo counters the prejudice-led accusations made against Esmeralda (and Quasimodo, too). Furthermore, although Esmeralda was not born a gypsy, she does identify as such and is treated accordingly, thus unconsciously playing the part of a gypsy girl. Through the construct of Esmeralda’s character, the novel may show to the reader both how gypsies were possibly perceived through medieval prejudice, as well as what connotations played a role in the Romanticist depiction of the gypsy as an exoticised Other, whose freedom and mystery appealed to the imagination. As Esmeralda turns out to be the daughter of a French civilian, her character poses questions about the view on gypsies as Others and brings the Other closer to home, the double identity of Esmeralda as the lost Agnes possibly signalling the instability of constructs as identity and otherness.

LIKE A REBELLIOUS BIRD

CONSTRUCTING THE CHARACTER OF CARMEN IN THE OPERA *CARMEN*

Before she entered the stage in 1875, Carmen from the Bizet’s opera was already well-known to the French public due to Prosper Mérimée’s popular novella *Carmen* (1845). Although

Bizet and librettists Meilhac and Halévy made changes in their operatic adaptation, the story's "shocking" factors like a "violent conflation of gender, race, and class . . . and the killing of a woman on stage" were retained (Colmeiro 141). Nonetheless, *Carmen* became "the most performed opera in history" (Bennahum 32). Wherein lies *Carmen's* perpetual appeal? The answer for this may lie in the multi-interpretable personality of its leading lady. This chapter sets out to investigate how Carmen's character in Bizet's opera is presented as a gypsy woman with a reputation as a lover, and how she is defined by her opposite character, Don José, the contrast between them representing a Romanticist binary between the exoticised Other and the bourgeois male.

The opera is set in Seville, Spain, where Carmen, a gypsy woman employed at a cigarette factory, wins the love of dragoon Don José, yet when she rejects him as her love for him has faded, her lover grows jealous and obsessive, ultimately murdering her out of desperation. One of the first aspects of Carmen's identity that is revealed, has to do with her reputation as a lover: young men, who "murmur words of love" to cigarette girls, ask Carmen "when [will you] give us your love?" (43-44). Carmen replies that it will not be today, after which she starts singing her famous "Habanera" about love. This song deserves particular attention as it not only describes Carmen's views on love, but predicts how she will behave throughout the opera due to these opinions. In the "Habanera" or "L'amour est un oiseau rebelle" there are two main images used to describe love: "a rebellious bird" and "a gypsy child" (44-46). The metaphor of the rebellious bird is associated with freedom as no "no one can seize" it and it is "a force no one can hold" (44). Carmen considers herself free and this freedom seems of crucial importance to her as she states that "Carmen . . . was born free, and she will die free!" (91). She will not allow José to trap her in a relationship without love and she throws away the ring he gave her (93), which might signify a wedding ring.

The equation with the gypsy child goes like this: "Love is like a gypsy child that knows no restrictions. If you don't love me, I'll love you. And if I love you, you'd better beware!" (45). Firstly, the French phrase "enfant de bohème" literally translates as "child of bohemia," an ambiguous term that could refer either to the sociocultural group of the gypsies or to a bohemian artist; although Carmen belongs to the former group, the connotations of the latter group remain present, as I will demonstrate later. Secondly, knowing that Carmen is a gypsy, the characterisation of love as a gypsy child may plead for an interpretation of Carmen as a representation of the love she sings about. This idea is substantiated through the shift from speaking in third person to first person, which allows Carmen to synchronise with the love she describes by voicing and embodying it. Finally, the warning that the one she loves

would better “beware,” hints towards a certain risk or danger, the loved one falling prey to her love, as it were, and this lover “knows no restrictions,” as Carmen seems willing to risk imprisonment and losing her job just to speak with José.

When it comes to love, Carmen and Don José do not see eye to eye; where Carmen’s love “is associated with uncertainty,” José’s “is associated with permanence and faithfulness” (Pels and Crébas 591). The toreador Escamillo explains to José that “Carmen’s affairs never last more than six months” (80); José, however, considers himself “doomed” in his love for Carmen as he states: “I shall compel you to bow to the destiny that links your fate with mine!” (84). Beside their different opinions on the nature of love, I argue that the binary between these two characters also hinges on their priorities: to Carmen, “love comes before duty,” as she says herself (62), while José considers duty the higher cause, for he is prepared to marry a girl, Micaëla, because it would please his mother (50). When Carmen then asks José to prove his love for herself by accompanying her to the mountains, he refuses this, retorting that “[i]t would be infamy to abandon my colors or desert my flag!” (69).

The conflict between duty and love can even be heard in the simultaneous playing of castanets, which Carmen plays for José’s entertainment, and bugles, which command him to return to quarters. Carmen considers the instruments mere “music accompaniment” for her singing and dancing (66), whereas José hears a command that calls him away from Carmen’s company. When Carmen finds that José would choose his duty over her love, she renounces her love for him, mocking his obedience to the bugles. Her calling him a “little boy” (66) reminds of an earlier scene in the opera when street boys mimic the passing soldiers (42), Carmen thus stressing José’s ignorance and childishness in blindly obeying the faraway commands.

The difference between Carmen’s and José’s views on love can also be found in the verbs they use when referring to love at particular stages in the opera: when Carmen asks José whether he loves her, for which she uses the verb “*aimer*” in French, he answers that he adores her, using rather “*adorer*” (65). These particular words are repeated several times in their final conversation, the opera ending with José’s lamentations “Carmen! Adored Carmen!” (94). Although both can be translated as “love,” they bear different connotations; “*aimer*” may refer to being in love with someone, a mutual affection, while “*adorer*” has a sense of worship or idolatry.⁸ Carmen’s love may be characterised as an intense, fleeting force that allows for an affair between people on mutual grounds without binding two individuals to

⁸ For an overview of translations and interpretations of the words “*aimer*” and “*adorer*,” please see the appendix.

each other, while José's adoration does bind people together forever and may cause him to place Carmen on a pedestal as the love of his life.

To the tragic plot it is essential that Carmen and José defend their own interpretations of love, as their miscommunication causes Carmen to stop loving José, while her lover becomes jealous and desperate as he sees his own destiny tied to hers. It seems to be in their nature—or upbringing—to behave a certain way, and they seem unable and unwilling to change this mind-set. José's sense of duty is embodied in Micaëla, as she represents José's mother's wishes for his future and the girl acts exclusively as a messenger in the opera, performing her assigned duty. However, Carmen's charm wins José over, and he speaks of her as “a dangerous woman . . . [,] a witch” (46) and a “demon” (49), explaining her effect on him as magic.

Where Micaëla is familiar to José and might feature as a respectable wife, Carmen rather appears as a mistress and a different creature almost, an exoticised Other. If Don José represents the ideals of the bourgeoisie, Carmen's bohemian connotations rebel against it, Pels and Crébas explaining how “the Carmen-version of free love . . . was simply ascribed to [gypsies] by the artistic *Bohème* which projected its own lifestyle onto that of the other group” (598). The tempting exoticised Other and the setting of the faraway Andalusia—where José, being a Basque, is a stranger as well—calls to mind flamboyant aesthetics and Orientalist connotations, placing the bourgeois male in an estranging and enchanting setting, far removed from his home with its morals and laws, and where he finds himself enchanted by an exoticised Other.

In this chapter, links between Carmen's views on love and her personality have been drawn, taking into account her reputation as a lover and her contrast to Don José. Where José considers love as fixed and subordinate to duty, Carmen's love is changeable and she considers it her highest priority. These clashing ideas of love form the crux of *Carmen's* tragic plot, José considering himself doomed to be with Carmen forever, losing all he holds dear because of it, while Carmen considers love as something momentary, a force that brings people together rather than binding individuals to one another. Like a rebellious bird Carmen refuses to be restrained by anyone, living and loving according to her ideas, and she is presented as an independent, free-spirited woman, embodying the conflation of ideals from the Parisian bohemians with the image of the gypsy. Rather than a passive love interest, it is Carmen who determines what will happen to her, and she lives up to her own words: “Carmen will never yield! She was born free, and she will die free!”

THE GIRL AND THE WOMAN

COMPARING ESMERALDA AND CARMEN

This chapter compares Esmeralda and Carmen to each other, starting with a comparison of their personalities as established in the previous chapters. Next, the story arcs and personalities of both characters are viewed in light of two themes—love and death—as these play a decisive role in the fates of these women, their respective experiences with love leading arguably to their tragic deaths. These themes can be viewed as general Romanticist themes, “the association of Romanticism, love and death” appearing, as Saul explains, in studies on German Romanticism, while being “equally firm outside of Germany” (165). Based on these findings, this chapter then investigates how the concept of the gypsy identity may be defined in the respective texts and how the approaches shown in *Notre-Dame* and *Carmen* may differ.

While Esmeralda and Carmen show similarities in some regards, they could not be more different in others. Where Esmeralda is young and naïve in matters such as love, Carmen appears as a seasoned lover and independent woman, familiar with the ways of the world. In *Notre-Dame* Esmeralda’s identity is presented as shaped by her upbringing, for although she was born Agnes, daughter of Paquette, she grew up as a gypsy girl and in turn that is how everyone—including herself—views her. Although Carmen is initially introduced in the opera as a cigarette girl, her gypsy identity is swiftly revealed and emphasised rather than questioned throughout the narrative, her valuation of love and freedom echoing the ideals of the Parisian bohemians, while her sharp contrast to José emphasises her otherness as a gypsy woman. Furthermore, where the audience is assured that Esmeralda’s appearance only *seems* magical, Carmen’s magical connotations are not as openly countered and remain therefore ambiguous, leaving the audience to wonder whether Carmen has really “cast a spell” over José as he states (68), or whether the dragoon merely believes his infatuation to be the result of magic. The following sections will discuss Esmeralda’s and Carmen’s relations to love and death, two factors that characterise their stories, while building on conclusions drawn here so as to further investigate the depiction of these women’s identities in the stories.

At first, Esmeralda is not looking for a lover, but for a loving parent: Gringoire explains that she “wears an amulet round her neck which . . . will . . . lead her to her parents but which would lose its virtue if the young girl lost hers” (262). Because of this, Esmeralda remains “as ferociously chaste as a nun,” according to Gringoire, while her tribe “holds her in . . . veneration, like a Virgin Mary” (263). Despite her focus on her quest, Esmeralda does have distinct ideas about what a man should be like: she tells Gringoire that a man “has a helmet on his head, a sword in his hand and golden spurs at his heels” (117), adding that she

“could only love a man who was able to protect me” (118). During their first encounter, Phoebus both looks the part and saves her, appearing thus as her ‘perfect’ man. Once Esmeralda becomes convinced that she loves him, her love proves unconditional, and she is willing to sacrifice her quest for his love (303).

Carmen’s love, however, seems particularly conditional, for she will not love Don José while he values duty over love. In mocking his obedience to the bugles’ call and calling him a little boy, Carmen stresses his ignorance in matters of love—her love, to be exact. She offers him a choice: either he becomes the man she desires and joins her in the mountains, or he leaves her forever. Although José followed her involuntarily, he is reluctant to leave her, yet does so when Micaëla tells him his mother is dying. Nonetheless, José warns Carmen that they “shall meet again” (85). Immediately after José leaves, Carmen “rushes in the direction of the Toreador’s voice” (85), already moving on to a new lover.

Although Frolo’s obsession leads to Esmeralda’s conviction and execution, her love for Phoebus may prove her death blow: at hearing his voice, Esmeralda nullifies her mother’s attempts to hide her as she “hurled herself at the window shouting: ‘Phoebus! Help me, my Phoebus!’” (475). Phoebus, however, had already left, and despite Paquette’s efforts Esmeralda is carried off and executed. Although the execution is beheld from afar, its dramatic impact is intensified by the focalisation on Quasimodo, who is initially ignorant of the situation, while the audience knows what he will see. The tableau darkens further when the narrator calls Esmeralda a “poor child” (487) and Paquette dies in an attempt to save her daughter, both instances underscoring Esmeralda’s identity as a child. While Esmeralda blindly trusted Phoebus based on appearances and her own image of him, her true protector, Quasimodo, is unable to save her a second time. As a young girl, Esmeralda might not have learned that beautiful appearances do not guarantee beautiful interiors, for her life before her torture and execution “had run so happily, so smoothly and so sweetly” (316). While she wandered through her beautiful world, people like Frolo and Phoebus cast her in roles she perhaps could not yet understand.

Carmen’s death evokes connotations of battle rather than execution as Carmen meets José outside the arena where Escamillo—Carmen’s lover—is bullfighting. The verbal fight in the foreground is paralleled with the bullfight in the arena, connecting love and bullfighting so that Carmen, too, may be regarded as a toreador, skilfully fighting her lovers with words until they fall for her, and she considers them dead as her love for them fades. Two statements from Escamillo substantiate this parallel: firstly, he states that “any man who wouldn’t risk his life for love, is not worth his salt” (80), extending thus the defying of death from the bullring to

love; secondly, Escamillo states before the bullfight: “Carmen, if you love me, . . . then very soon you’ll be proud of me” (88), linking his victory to the happiness of his lover. Carmen’s reply: “I love you, and may I die if I have ever loved anyone as much as I love you” (88) echoes Escamillo’s opinions, and her own fight, too, may ensure their future happiness or her death. Ultimately, José kills Carmen with violence rather than words, but as Carmen stood her ground, it seems that José could not win as he laments her passing.

Although Esmeralda’s reveal as the lost Agnes partly counters her gypsy identity, she is treated throughout the novel as if she were a gypsy and identifies as such herself, her character thus still allowing for an investigation of gypsy representation in *Notre-Dame*. The notion that Esmeralda was not born a gypsy, but has become one through upbringing, implies a view on the gypsy identity as a way of life that can be adopted, rather than being something inborn. The malleability of human personality is also shown through Quasimodo, Esmeralda’s counterpart, who might be a gypsy child shaped into a bell-ringer. While prejudices against gypsy women are presented in the Ecclesiastical Court and Paquette’s story, to name a few moments, these prejudices are countered in Esmeralda’s characterisation, so that the reader knows better than to think her a witch or a temptress. The idea of the gypsy identity as a way of life ties in with the ideas of the French bohemian artists, who identified with the gypsies’ wandering lifestyle, yet also projected their own ideals about love and art on their vision of this life. Esmeralda’s ambiguous identity, then, problematizes absolute distinctions between a Self and an Other as she combines aspects from both in being simultaneously Agnes and Esmeralda.

Bizet’s opera, on the contrary, portrays Carmen’s identity as unchangeable, the crux of the narrative lying in Carmen’s unyielding valuation of love over duty and Don José’s struggle between love and his own priorities. “[Carmen] was born free and she will die free,” Carmen states, and indeed this is as Carmen will always be in this operatic version of her. Carmen’s fixed nature establishes her as José’s opposite and an exotic Other, and José cannot comply with her wishes without forsaking everything he holds dear. Escamillo, however, lives by similar values as Carmen and is able to love her and remain himself because of them. To José Carmen ultimately remains the magical, inapprehensible creature that Esmeralda at first glance seemed to be, and it seems that the Romanticist gap between José’s bourgeois values and Carmen’s exoticised gypsy image cannot be bridged successfully.

What I have argued in this chapter is that the storylines and personalities of Esmeralda and Carmen show similarities, such as their devotion to love and their deaths caused by men who are obsessed with them, but also important differences: where Esmeralda is a young girl

tossed about in a whirlwind of events as people regard her through their prejudices and imaginations, Carmen is a strong woman, determined to live and die by her own principles. Esmeralda's death portrays her as a victim of corrupt forces, while Carmen's death shows her steadfastness in valuing love and freedom, losing her life while holding on to her principles. Hugo presents a gypsy identity that is ambiguous, malleable and one that can be adopted by others, whereas Bizet portrays the harsh antithesis between the Romanticist interpretations of a gypsy woman and the bourgeois male. Through comparing these characters, one may find that French Romanticism does not construct one uniform image of the gypsy woman, but may allow for polyvalent interpretations and debates on the gypsy identity.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have set out to investigate the presentation of Esmeralda and Carmen as gypsy women in respectively Hugo's novel and Bizet's opera. Despite several similarities, such as their devotion to love and their seemingly magical appearance, they proved to be drastically different characters. Rather than a gypsy woman, Esmeralda is revealed as a young girl with a double identity, whose youth and naïveté may prevent her from understanding the power and roles other people project on her based on her beauty and exoticised status, while the reader learns that her magical appearance is *only* appearance. Carmen, however, is presented in stark contrast to the bourgeois Don José as a gypsy woman and a passionate lover, who values freedom and love above all else. She seems fully aware of her power over men and appears familiar with the ways of the world around her, her tragic mistake lying rather in her choice of a 'naïve' lover than being naïve herself. Where Esmeralda falls victim to forces around her and is executed despite her innocence, Carmen proves herself a toreador in the arena of love, prepared to face José and die for love and freedom. Carmen's portrayal as a fixed character and an exoticised Other might then entail a view on the gypsy identity as something inborn and unchangeable, as Carmen and José seem to live in different worlds entirely. Esmeralda, on the contrary, may appear at first as an exoticised Other, yet her ambiguous identity questions this status, bringing the Other closer to the Self, which in turn might entail an understanding of the gypsy identity as a way of life, an attitude that can be adopted.

These texts, then, display different understandings of and attitudes towards the gypsy identity, allowing for debate about gypsy representation in French Romanticism. In this investigation I have been able to show but a fragment of what can be said about these texts and their representation of gypsy women—let alone all that can be said about gypsy representation in French Romanticist texts or Romanticist texts in general. These two texts in

particular continue to appear in today's cultural imagination, as *Carmen* remains one of the most frequently performed operas worldwide, while rumours about new screen adaptations of Hugo's story circulate the Internet, signalling how these nineteenth-century texts are still of influence today. As can be seen in the wealth of secondary literature, when examining this subject there is much more to be said, as one can look at other gypsy characters in the texts, different adaptations of the texts, how Bizet's opera differs from Merimée's novella or how these texts relate to other works from their respective time periods or authors. That being said, I believe investigations into these texts have far from ended, and I hope that *Notre-Dame* and *Carmen*—and their numerous adaptations—continue to spark critical investigation and discussion.

Word count: 6020 (excluding formal information, abstract, notes, appendix and works cited)

APPENDIX

Chapter 1

General summary

The story is set in medieval Paris, where Esmeralda through her dancing and singing attracts the attention of archdeacon Frollo, who becomes obsessed with her. Esmeralda's love for captain Phoebus is part of the reasons for Esmeralda's resolute rejection of the archdeacon's advances, and in his frustration Frollo becomes determined to win her over or destroy her. Despite attempts from among others Quasimodo to save and protect her, Esmeralda is executed as she is wrongly condemned for the murder of Phoebus—while this was Frollo's doing and Phoebus turns out to be alive—a phenomenon followed by 'tragic' endings for the other characters: Frollo dies as he is pushed over the balustrades of the Notre-Dame by Quasimodo, Phoebus marries his betrothed and has to say farewell to his bachelor life, Pierre Gringoire becomes chiefly a writer of tragedies, and Quasimodo's ending seems unknown, yet the story ends with a description of how two skeletons were found in the catacombs where those executed by hanging were buried, a deformed skeleton holding on to another skeleton, and the reader may recognise them as Quasimodo and Esmeralda.

Table 1: Comparing Esmeralda and Quasimodo

Esmeralda	Quasimodo
Woman	Man
Young adult	Young adult
Angelic connotations (appearance)	Demonic connotations (appearance)
Magical/supernatural connotations (appearance)	Magical/supernatural connotations (appearance)
Virgin Mary connotations	Gargoyle connotations
Musical (she sings and dances for her profession)	Musical (he sings once in the story; he rings the bells of Notre-Dame for his profession; important: he is deaf)
Beautiful (appearance)	Ugly (appearance)
Devoted to love (unconditional)	Devoted to love (unconditional)
Grown up with the travelling gypsies	Grown up in the church of Notre-Dame
Was stolen as a baby	Was cast away and adopted as baby
Naïve	Knows the sorrows of this world
Loved by all/many	Resented by all/many
Good Samaritan role (gives Quasimodo some water and saves Pierre Gringoire from execution)	Guardian angel (saves Esmeralda from execution the first time and protects Esmeralda during her stay at Notre-Dame)
Finds her mother, a woman who hated her because she was a gypsy and gypsies had stolen her child, yet when Esmeralda is revealed as Agnes her mother's hate turns to love	Finds out that his father-figure (archdeacon Frollo) may not have been the good man Quasimodo thought he was and ultimately Quasimodo chooses his love for Esmeralda over his loyalty to Frollo
Appears as a gypsy, but was born Agnes, daughter of Paquette from Rheims, and thus she is the daughter of a French civilian	Appears as a bell-ringer, but might have been born a gypsy
Despite her reveal as Agnes Esmeralda's identity as a gypsy girl remains of importance, which shows the power of this role. In that sense, she is tied to her role as a	Tied to the Notre-Dame, although he does often go "out with his master, threading the cool, narrow, gloomy streets around Notre-Dame" (177). He is stuck in his own body as the narrator describes how "the state of his

gypsy, for she <i>is</i> a gypsy through her upbringing.	soul” was affected by “[its] stunted envelope and leading so unsocial a life,” and when he grew deaf it seemed that “[t]he one door left open on the world for him by nature had been abruptly closed for ever [and] [a]s it closed, . . . [Quasimodo’s] soul fell into a profound night” (164-65).
Lives almost solely in the public domain, spends a lot of time outdoors	Lives secluded, most often found in the Notre-Dame; when he is in the public domain, Claude Frolo accompanies him

Chapter 2

General summary

The story is set in Seville, Spain, where the unsuspecting Don José falls in love with the factory girl Carmen, who throws him a flower to show her love. At first, he rejects her affections, yet when he has to escort her to prison—she was involved in a fight with another factory worker—she manages to persuade him and he lets her go, spending two months in prison because of this. Once he is free again, Don José visits Carmen, yet she renounces her love for him when he states that he has to leave her again to do his duty as a soldier. From that moment on, a tension between the two rises, as Don José is torn between his love for Carmen and his sense of duty, eventually leaving Carmen to visit his dying mother after a fight with Carmen’s new lover, the toreador Escamillo. In the final scene, during Escamillo’s bullfight, Carmen faces Don José and after an argument he kills her, stating that people may arrest him as he takes Carmen in his arms and laments her passing.

Table 2: Comparing Carmen and Don José

Carmen	Don José
Woman	Man
Gypsy from Andalusia (she lives there, in any case)	Basque, not as familiar with Andalusia as Carmen
Magical connotations (appearance); also called “demon” and “witch” by Don José	Soldier/dragoon (appearance)

Can be compared to a bullfighter	Is compared by Carmen to a little boy
Musical (sings and dances for entertainment)	Not particularly musical; understands bugles' sound as a command, not music
Beautiful, enchanting	Handsome (Frasquite and Mercédès—Carmen's friends, also gypsy women—call him a “handsome dragoon” (64)
Devoted to love, love is the most important cause	Devoted to his duty, which clashes with his love for Carmen
Uses the verb “aimer” often	Uses the verb “adorer” at crucial moments in the opera, but also uses “aimer” at times
Has a reputation as a lover	Is novel to love, his mother wants him to marry Micaëla
Works in a cigarette factory; partakes in smuggling operations with other gypsies	Works as a corporal in the army
Threatens with words	Threatens with violence
Values freedom	Values stability/certainty

Translations for “aimer” and “adorer”

These translations and explications of the terms “aimer” and “adorer” are quoted from the *Cambridge Dictionary* website. As the French sentences explicate the different interpretations of the words more than the direct English translations offered, I have taken the liberty of translating the French sentences to English; these translations follow the French original quote and are followed by the original English translation provided by the website.

“Aimer”

- “(d’amour) éprouver de l’amour pour qqn” (“to feel/experience love for someone”); “to love”
- “(d’amitié) avoir de l’amitié, de la sympathie pour qqn” (“to have friendship with, feel sympathy for someone”); “to like”
- “(qqch) avoir une attirance pour qqch” (“to have an interest in something, to feel attracted to something”); “to like”
- “(souhaiter) souhaiter, vouloir qqch” (“to wish, want something”); “to like”

“Adorer”

- “(une personne) aimer beaucoup qqn” (“to love someone a lot”); “to adore”
- “(une chose) aimer avec passion” (“to love something deeply”); “to adore, to love”
- “rendre un hommage religieux à un dieu” (“to pay religious homage to a god”); “to worship”

Chapter 3

Table 3: Comparing Esmeralda and Carmen

Esmeralda	Carmen
Appears magic; this is countered/nuanced	Appears magic; magical connotations continue/are not openly countered
Agency (has a residence of her own and can come and go as she pleases)	Agency (residence is not mentioned, she is able to come and go as she pleases)
Medieval Paris, France	Early nineteenth-century Seville, Spain
Esmeralda is mainly described by others	Carmen also describes herself (“Habanera”)
Opposite: Quasimodo, also an Other character	Opposite: Don José, representative of bourgeois values and therewith arguably closer to a Self than an Other
Malleable identities	Fixed identities
Reputation as a virgin; represents Holy Virgin in a way	Reputation as a lover; embodiment of this love
Believes love lasts forever; Phoebus believes in short affairs	Believes in short affairs; Don José believes that love lasts forever
First chooses duty over love (finding her parents), but changes her mind and devotes herself to love (Phoebus)	Values love above all, but specifically her kind of love, which involves freedom
Presented as a young girl, naïve, childish; her lover may know more about the world and can be seen as a more adult character	Presented as a strong, independent woman, an adult who knows the ways of the world; Don José is mocked by her as a child due to his obedience to his duty
Presented as an Other, but turns out to be born a French girl; status as an Other is undermined/questioned, she is familiarised	Presented as an exoticised Other, almost a different creature, can and will not change her ways

Used to freedom, but is willing to give up freedom for love	Values freedom above all, as freedom is part of her definition of love and love a part of her perspective on freedom
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Brief explanation for the illustration on the front page

The front page of this thesis features a custom-made illustration of a sachet and a flower, two items which are linked to Esmeralda and Carmen. The sachet belongs to Esmeralda, whose name might even be derived from the green emerald on top of the sachet, as Esmeralda herself speculates in the novel despite her ignorance of what her name means (119). The flower reminds of the flower Carmen threw at Don José early in the first act of the opera, a token of Carmen's love and her power over the dragoon.

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