

The Phantom of the Opera:
Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

By Patricia Drumright
Adjunct Assistant Professor
Department of English and Philosophy
Monroe Community College
Rochester, New York
pdrumright@monroecc.edu

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

Many Americans are familiar with the title *The Phantom of the Opera*, and most of them probably think of the musical when they hear the phrase—and with good reason. The musical adaptation of *The Phantom of the Opera* has been making headlines for more than twenty-five years.

The collaboration of Andrew Lloyd Webber and Cameron Mackintosh and the opening of their West End musical made the news in the mid-1980s. Popular reception, positive reviews, and critical acclaim quickly followed—as did a Broadway version that warranted its own headlines in 1987-88. The shows have become well respected for their longevity and their profitability and have inspired an elite franchise of musical properties for Lloyd Webber. At their silver anniversaries, both shows are still going strong—as are a number of subsequent derivations.

In contrast, there is a centennial that most people missed: The original *Fantôme de l'Opéra* recently reached its 100th anniversary with little fanfare. The story, by the French writer Gaston Leroux, was first serialized in newspapers in France, Britain, and the United States, and then it was published in novel form in 1911 (Perry 28, 30). One hundred years later, a first-round Internet search revealed that one of the few ways the novel's milestone anniversary was recognized was with a Signet Classics "Centennial Edition" mass market paperback that was released in October 2010.

The stage shows, however, really know how to celebrate in style. As many learned from traditional media outlets and from various websites, in the fall of 2011, the West End show's 25th anniversary was cause for a sparkling re-creation of the original

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

Lloyd Webber show and a two-day engagement at the Royal Albert Hall. In addition, in America alone, the unique London performance was broadcast in movie theaters, rented through Redbox kiosks, shown on PBS, and available on DVD. Now, in January 2013, American theatergoers are expecting their own celebration: The Broadway show will reach its 25th anniversary and is having its own commemoration.

In between these celebratory spectacles—and after the 100th anniversary of the original novel and the creation of countless adaptations of the story—questions, which have previously been posed by others, arise again: Why is *The Phantom of the Opera* so immensely popular? Why have so many adaptations of the story been created, and which “phantom” is popular: the novel, the earlier cinematic depictions, the stage musicals, or the title character himself?

The overwhelming popularity of the musical and its 25th anniversary production were the inspirations for this exploratory inquiry, which should still be considered a work in progress. At this point though, it appears that many audience members identify with the title character and share his loneliness, desperation, and heartache. Many more enjoy the sheer theatricality of the Lloyd Webber stage shows. Others, however, prefer the 2004 film version of the musical, while others still favor an earlier film with Lon Chaney or Claude Rains, and a few even value the original novel with its blend of mystery, romance, and horror.

But is there more to the Phantom’s continued popularity than the enjoyment of something entertaining—some shocks, some thrills, some tears? Is the Phantom so popular *because* the Lloyd Webber show is so spectacular, or is the Phantom *still* popular because there is something in the story itself that engenders that continued popularity?

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

These are the primary questions that were initially answered in a presentation at the 2012 NEPCA conference. This paper intends to further address these questions and offer some more detailed, but still preliminary, explanations.

Although these inquiries are still ongoing, this paper offers several assertions. First, the story was popular in the decades before Lloyd Webber opened his musical; second, the Lloyd Webber stage version is indeed a phenomenally successful show and is largely responsible for our awareness of the story today; and, finally, the story itself has fundamental qualities that would have warranted its continued popularity without Lloyd Webber's participation in its reincarnations.

Specifically, this paper puts forth the idea that the story of Erik, the Phantom of the Opera, in at least its original telling and in several of its more available and more familiar guises, has enjoyed repeated popularity because the story features archetypal characters who follow archetypal plots. In addition, the archetypal characters are more significant than is immediately apparent. Obvious archetypes are at work in the story, yet more important ones inform our appreciation of the tale.

The Original Novel

For those who haven't read Gaston Leroux's novel *Le Fantôme de l'Opéra* or seen the classic Lon Chaney Phantom, the Lloyd Webber stage version, or the 2004 film, be assured that Leroux told quite a tale—one that contrasts ugliness with elegance, genius with madness, and ruthlessness with compassion. Although subsequent adaptations all differ, to one degree or another, from the original narrative, the basic plot is as follows:

Set in the Paris Opera House in the late 1800s, the story revolves around three main figures. Erik, the title character, is often described as a “disfigured musical genius”

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

who makes his home in the dank, dark cellars under the glamorous opera house. His face, deformed since birth (or scarred later in life, depending on the version of the story), makes him an outcast who hides behind a mask whenever he ventures outside his lair, but his talent is magnificent, and he eventually comes to secretly tutor Christine Daae, a young member of the opera company. Christine, the protagonist of the story, had been told years earlier by her dying father that he would send her the Angel of Music, so when she begins to hear Erik's singing and then receive his coaching, she assumes he is the angel sent from Heaven.

Under his tutelage as "her angel" and through his machinations as the Phantom or Opera Ghost (as he is known to others in the company), Christine gains the lead role in a special performance, and she sings brilliantly. Her success is noticed by everyone, including Raoul, the handsome young Vicomte de Chagny, who had been a childhood friend of hers. Now that they are adults, Raoul, the third and least of the main characters, takes a romantic interest in Christine, who is equally attracted to him. The arrival of Raoul threatens Erik's claim on Christine, and the Phantom's jealousy and anger drive him to a "descent into madness" (as his increasingly dangerous behavior is often described). His criminal acts include threats, assaults, kidnapping, and murder in his desperate attempts to win Christine's love.

One noteworthy thing about this fantastic story is that Leroux's writing style reads like a non-fiction account of actual events. Furthering this sense of verisimilitude, Leroux actually names himself as the narrator of *Le Fantôme de l'Opéra* (xxiii), uses the first person pronoun (I) in quite a few expository passages, and repeatedly asserts that Erik's story is true. Of course, it is not. The story that was first serialized in 1909-1910

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

was the product of Leroux's writing skills, innate creativity, and love of the theater, for he was an aficionado of the opera who knew the stories and the trappings of the Paris Opera and how to immortalize them in his work of fiction (Perry 22, 24).

Therefore, the realistic journalistic tone and detailed (but fictional) accounts are understandable since Leroux had been a successful newspaperman before beginning to write mysteries and horror. Originally a lawyer, the eventual-novelist first had a considerable career as a court reporter, theater critic, and foreign correspondent before pursuing fiction writing full time. As a skilled mystery writer, Leroux's talents have been compared to those of Arthur Conan Doyle and Edgar Allan Poe (Perry 22, 24, 26). Consequently, Gaston Leroux's talent for bringing to life the fictional story of a fantastic character appears to be one reason why audiences are so accepting of this improbable yet extraordinary tale.

The Story's Early Popularity: The First Wave of Adaptations

Leroux's fictional story was originally popular enough to be serialized abroad, translated into English, and published in book form. Within several years, the story attracted the attention of European filmmakers, and one of the first adaptations of Erik's story was made. Although this particular film no longer exists, there is evidence that it was made around 1916, which is within only five or six years of the original story's publication ("Adaptations").

The most familiar early cinematic version appeared less than ten years later, which is about fifteen years after the story's novelization. In 1924-25, a silent film adaptation was made that remained quite faithful to the original narrative. The horror film, which featured Lon Chaney as the title character, was an expensive project at Universal

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

Studios. It had a large budget to cover an elaborate production that included a replica of the Paris Opera House (Laemmle). The Chaney film, which was primarily directed by Rupert Julian, was admired enough that the studio reissued it only four years later, in 1929, when “talkies” attracted new audiences. Not only did Chaney’s portrayal of a truly horrific Phantom become one of the most recognizable roles in Hollywood history, but the movie also became one of the all-time classics of the early film era.

In less than a generation, in 1943, the film was remade, and the story was reworked to star Claude Rains as a Phantom who was not deformed from birth but was disfigured in a fight. In addition, this Phantom is Christine’s unannounced yet devoted father. This film, directed by Arthur Lubin, was a musical and, like its silent predecessor, was quite a production. It also featured a big-name star (Nelson Eddy), modern technology (color), and spectacle (lavish scenes, costumes, and sets).

Less than twenty years later, in 1962, the story was reworked yet again. Hammer Films produced their version—a British horror film starring Herbert Lom as a more sedate Phantom whose violence is perpetrated by a henchman (Hall 60). And within another generation, in 1986, Andrew Lloyd Webber and Cameron Mackintosh raised the curtain on their musical adaptation that starred Michael Crawford, Sarah Brightman, and Steve Barton as the Phantom, Christine, and Raoul, respectively.

An initial review of the literature reveals that the character of Erik was resurrected at least twenty times between 1911 when the original novel was published in English and 1985 when Lloyd Webber was working on his musical. Something in the character or in the story inspired at least nine film versions (including the ones described), two cartoons, four television movies, and six theatrical productions. Some of these variations were

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

American-made; others were European, and a few were Asian (“Adaptations”). Some were successful; some were not, but none managed to suffice in the need to tell the story or to encounter it. For some reason, not one—including the phenomenally successful Lloyd Webber musical to come—managed this.

A Most Spectacular Musical

To answer one of the guiding questions of this inquiry, yes, one of the reasons why the Phantom has been so very popular over the last twenty-five years is because the Andrew Lloyd Webber-Cameron Mackintosh musical is so very, very spectacular.

When the two were envisioning their new project, they clearly focused on the love story. Intentionally or not, that meant they downplayed the original tale of a horrific-looking outcast and cold-blooded murderer whose “death’s head” appearance (Leroux 5) and heinous crimes would make it impossible for Christine to choose him—even though her character has always felt a great connection to him. Instead, their show emphasized the Phantom’s isolation, his musical vision, and the mysterious attraction Christine feels for him. It also brought to life both the emotions of despair and hope: Sarah Brightman and the other leading ladies have always needed to depict Christine’s enduring grief for her late father, her tragic relationship with Erik, and her rekindled love for her dashing young man.

In short, the musical offers something for almost everyone. There is mystery and magic, power and seduction, and passion and love as well as a special effect that has become a classic of contemporary theater—the crashing chandelier. All this is accomplished through dramatic melodies that are, in turns, exciting, seductive, and haunting, through poignant lyrics that engage the mind and touch the heart, and through

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

acclaimed performers who have exquisite singing voices and first-rate acting talent that allow them to embody a tortured Phantom, a conflicted Christine, and a romantic Raoul. In addition, the show provides unparalleled renditions of some of the conventions of musical theater: dramatic sets, vivid costumes, elegant dancing, joyous singing, and unique special effects.

Such exceptional execution and memorable music were among the reasons for the show's appeal stated in an email interview by Hadley Fraser, who portrayed Raoul in the 25th anniversary production: "The show's enduring popularity, to my mind, has an awful lot to do with the genius of the staging and stagecraft, and equally a quite incredible score—one that burned itself into the musical landscape almost immediately." For Fraser (who explained that he first knew of the story as an audience member before becoming a cast member), and surely for many others, the visual experience provided by the musical is as important as the auditory one.

Even disregarding the human conflict and the universal themes retained in the revised story, as well as the memorable music created for the musical, the sheer spectacle of Andrew Lloyd Webber's show has made it unimaginably popular—and unbelievably successful. Considered among the most expensive productions to stage, the musical's popularity has made it one of the most profitable.

The Most Successful Musical of All Time

The Andrew Lloyd Webber-Cameron Mackintosh stage show is routinely described as "the most successful musical of all time," and, according to the website for the Lloyd Webber franchise, the show's statistics verify that claim: In its first twenty-five years, the stage show has garnered more than fifty awards, has been seen by more

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

than 130 million people, and has brought in more than \$5.6 billion in revenue. Both the West End and Broadway companies have had more than 10,000 performances; the libretto has been translated into fifteen languages, and productions have been mounted in 145 cities in twenty-seven countries (“The Show”). That is the kind of “circulation” that an enterprising newsman like Leroux could never have imagined.

Even so, the urge to retell and rework the story—as well as the desire to re-encounter it—has not been limited to the Lloyd Webber musical. In fact, it appears that the commercial and critical success of the stage show has inspired a number of the story’s later adaptations and attracted many of its new “phans” (as aficionados of the story are known on the Internet and elsewhere).

The Story’s Continued Popularity: The Second Wave of Adaptations

The extraordinary success of the Lloyd Webber stage musical is undoubtedly responsible for a variety of the adaptations that were conceived between 1986, when the show first opened, and 2011, when it celebrated its silver anniversary. There is most likely a direct correlation between the unparalleled reception of the musical and other adaptations that appeared within the next several years. Any number of the adaptations produced in the years following the initial triumph in London or the immediate success in New York were very likely created in response to—and designed to capitalize on—the extraordinary popularity of the Lloyd Webber show.

Between 1986 and 2011, there were at least thirty more productions including twenty other stage versions. Another four movies were filmed. One television mini-series, two cartoons, and two parodies or knock-offs were made, and two different radio productions were broadcast. In addition, Leroux’s character has inspired the creation of

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

scores of prequels, sequels, and rewrites as well as dozens of other derivations including children's works, comics, graphic novels, non-fiction books, translations, and songs ("Adaptations"). In fact, audiences far off Broadway are familiar with the story. A quick look on the Internet at lists of adaptations shows that the Phantom of the Opera has been surpassed only by the likes of Elizabeth Bennett, Count Dracula, and Sherlock Holmes as a source of inspiration for subsequent derivations.

Any list of adaptations that appeared after the success of Lloyd Webber's two original stage shows must also include the rest of his franchise. In addition to the fixtures in London and New York, his touring companies traveled around the world. Other companies settled in for long-term engagements in metropolitan cities like Toronto, Tokyo, Budapest, and Las Vegas, which received its own reworked version of the musical (*The Brilliant Original*). In 2004, an extravagant cinematic version of the musical was directed by Joel Schumacher and has since been available on VHS and DVD, and the stunning musical sequel *Love Never Dies* opened in 2010, was reworked in 2011, was beamed around the world in 2012, and was then released on DVD ("*Love Never Dies*").

As mentioned earlier, the first Lloyd Webber *Phantom* generated yet another adaptation in the form of the 25th anniversary production that lavishly recreated the original 1986 show and was staged in splendor at the Royal Albert Hall in 2011. According to an online source, "*The Phantom of the Opera at the Royal Albert Hall*," one performance was beamed live around the world, and an edited version was released on DVD in 2012. In addition, those successes seem to have generated enough interest for a company to open in Johannesburg in early 2012 and for a new production to set out on a

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

year-long 2012-2013 tour through the United Kingdom (*The Brilliant Original*). That new production appears to be the latest of the adaptations—for now.

While the huge success of the musical must be largely responsible for many of the adaptations of the late 1980s and early 1990s, the re-creations that continued to be produced ten and twenty years later may not all be able to trace their origins back to the West End. (Of course, the 2004 film version, the musical's sequel, and its anniversary production originated in Lloyd Webber's creative domain.) But what of the others? What of the more recent, unrelated adaptations? What has inspired their creators? Those questions inspire this inquiry: Is there anything else that could account for the story's continued or repeated popularity? In other words, would the story have continued to be retold if that world-famous musical had never been staged? This paper asserts so, for the nature of the title character and aspects of his story carry sufficient fascination of their own to explain much of *The Phantom's* long life and widespread appeal.

Other Explanations for the Phantom's Continued Popularity

Surely, there are quite a few possible reasons—separate from the influence of the musical—why Leroux's story continues to reappear in popular culture. The kind of story that it is, the number of themes that resonate within it, and its connections to our socio-economic status are just some explanations for our ongoing interest.

Multiple Genres

One of the most obvious explanations for the Phantom's continued popularity is the fact that Leroux and his successors have crafted stories that offer “something for just about everyone.”

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

Leroux, the writer of detective novels, primarily crafted a mystery. In the prologue, Leroux as the narrator describes the plot as a mystery in which strange happenings at the Opera House need explaining (xix). The novel is structured as the history of the investigation that Leroux the narrator conducted after the kidnapping of one character, the disappearance of another, and the death of a third (xix, xx). The narrator describes startling events and shocking crimes. He refers to interviews, manuscripts, and proceedings, and he finally draws his own conclusions that ultimately “solve” the mysteries—but this is more than a detective novel.

Leroux also wrote a romance. In fact, there are several love stories: Erik and Christine share a unique bond based on his long-term presence in her life. Their shared passion for music and the secret, intimate nature of their relationship suggest that what they have is “true love.” In addition, Christine and Raoul share another kind of bond based on their childhood time together. That early connection and their adult attraction for each other suggest that theirs is the relationship that is meant to be. While the Phantom offers passion, Raoul offers romance—but this is not merely a love story.

Leroux, the former journalist, additionally wrote a work that balances between being a melodrama and a tragedy. On the one hand, with all of its trappings, its improbable characters, and their highly dramatic actions, the novel and some of its variations are often seen as melodramas. Sensational scenes are designed to shock characters and readers alike, and overly emotional scenarios wrench hearts. On the other hand, *Le Fantôme de L’Opéra* is about a genius, a diva, and an aristocrat—people who are supposed to be better than we are, as Aristotle purported. Thus, the story can be considered a tragedy in the tradition of *Hamlet*. As in many tragedies, the title character

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

here exhibits both inspirational strengths as well as devastating flaws and finally commits irreparable, unpardonable acts. Erik has at least one tragic flaw: His physical disfigurement has damaged his soul, and he relentlessly pursues his goal of winning Christine until his tragic end—which is what usually happens to Gothic monsters.

This tale can easily be considered a work of Gothic fiction or a horror story, as defined in *Merriam Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature*. The Phantom's story features many of the conventions of the Gothic novel including the grand medieval architectural style of churches and castles, "subterranean passages...hidden panels, and trapdoors" ("Gothic" 480). In fact, part of the description of the gothic novel in the *Encyclopedia of Literature* seems to have been written about *Le Fantôme de l'Opéra* specifically: "Such novels were expected to be dark and tempestuous and full of ghosts, madness, outrage, superstition, and revenge" (480). Set in a majestic theater in a superstitious Catholic country, with an opera ghost who obsesses over a young woman to the point of becoming enraged at her interest in another man and exacting revenge on those involved, *The Phantom of the Opera* fulfills most of the criteria of the Gothic tale quite thoroughly. As a work of horror, which can be considered a variation of the Gothic novel, the story includes a number of the conventions of that genre: primarily its intent to frighten the audience, its grotesque and fantastic title character, and its eerie atmosphere ("Horror Story" 559). The original story—and the 1925 film in particular—shock with their monstrous title character, his violent criminal behavior, and the terror felt by the other characters. Although subsequent adaptations have changed a variety of the details, the title character remains an unnatural embodiment of the Other, and the merciless behavior, brutal crimes, and chilling thrills usually continue—as does the human element.

Multiple Themes

Considering that *Le Fantôme de l'Opéra* is a complex narrative that follows a number of storylines and employs a mixture of conventions, the presence of a quantity of universal concepts or themes should be expected.

As a mystery, it offers ideas about right and wrong, justice and revenge. As a romance, it questions notions of true love and those of forbidden love as well as distinctions between romance and sexuality, love and passion. As a tragedy, it explores universals about self-determination, agency, and destiny. As a work of horror, it taps into our interest in the bizarre, our craving for excitement, and our ultimate need for safety and security.

Likewise, the story deals with universal experiences such as rejection, isolation, and betrayal, human emotions including love, passion, and adoration, and psychological conditions such as obsession and madness. It also portrays the ideals of sacrifice, mercy, and redemption. Such an assortment of universal themes was also described by Hadley Fraser, the actor who portrayed Raoul in the 25th anniversary show, who explained what he considered to be the story's ongoing attraction:

There is something timeless in this tale that obviously tugs at people deep down. Can we all identify ourselves in one of the three characters (gender roles thrown aside)? Probably. Likely we've all been, during our lives, all three sides of this particular triangle, and to see it played out in front of us allows us to relive those moments from the safety of our theatre seats. Who did we end up as? Again, we can understand, consciously or otherwise, the final pain of the Phantom, the torn despair and delight of Christine, and the "success" of Raoul.

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

Such comments about the story's universality once again suggest that the legend of the Phantom, the young singer, and the young suitor has something for just about everyone—which appears to be the case for some scholars as well.

Cultural Work

A comprehensive catalog of the vast majority of adaptations of the Leroux story was compiled by Ann C. Hall into *Phantom Variations*, which was published in 2009. Hall offers detailed background information, complete plot summaries, and her own insightful commentary on an array of derivations that appeared between 1925 and the first decade of the 21st Century. Some of Hall's conclusions are that the title character's popularity is guaranteed by contemporary electronic means of communication and that the story's morals—looks are deceiving, so inner human connections defeat outer appearances—are currently vital (178). For Hall, Erik's story is one that continues to deeply resonate with a range of audiences.

Another particularly impressive analysis of *The Phantom of the Opera* was completed by Jerrold E. Hogle, whose interest in the Phantom's popularity began before the Lloyd Webber musical reached its fifteenth anniversary. Hogle's scholarly assessment of the cultural significance of *Le Fantôme de l'Opéra* posits several theories. One is that Erik, as the sexual Other, threatens the authority of the patriarchy, so Christine's choice of Raoul is required to reaffirm patriarchal authority (234). Another theory leads to conclusions about Erik's role as the Other during a time of class, gender, and race divisions and changes and in light of their impact on middle-class identity construction (234-39). The massive monograph, which is entitled *The Undergrounds of The Phantom of the Opera* and was published in 2002, dissects and discusses virtually

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

every aspect of the original novel and many subsequent adaptations. Hogle employs various critical approaches and offers a number of convincing arguments for the enduring cultural significance of the Phantom and his story.

Scholarly theories and extended arguments often involve complex contemporary critical approaches and delve into some of the less-recognized interactions among texts, society, and self. This paper, however, uses a more traditional critical approach and proffers another explanation for the story's continued popularity—and significance—based on familiar conventions of characterization, narrative plot, and gender roles.

Sources and Theories

Of course, there are multiple reasons why Gaston Leroux's story continues to be read, re-read and re-told. As a work of literature, it is an intricate one that is open to a number of critiques. Much of our current familiarity is also because of the success of the Lloyd Webber musical adaptations. In addition, the enduring significance of the Phantom's story can be explained by sophisticated analysis and by any number of the story's inherent aspects that readily appeal to a variety of audiences.

Still, another reason for the story's longevity is possible. For now, these ideas rely on a limited number of primary sources including a translation of the original Leroux novel, the DVD of the 2004 Schumacher film, and the DVD of the 2011 Lloyd Webber anniversary production as well as DVDs of the 1925 and 1943 films and a limited number of secondary sources.

Based on this preliminary exploration, it appears that the ongoing popularity of the story—and its enduring cultural significance—are also because the story is essentially an archetypal one. The original *Fantôme de l'Opéra* and many of its derivations feature a

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

number of archetypal characters engaged in a number of archetypal plots. Audiences recognize the storylines, relate to the characters, and know how to respond to their predicaments. Moreover, the obvious archetypal aspects of the story are only the beginning; the presence of older patterns, deeper connections, and greater consequences are the basis of the foremost theories of this exploratory essay.

Archetypes

Notions of archetypes arose in the 20th century from the theories of the psychologist Carl Jung, who defined “the collective unconscious” or inherited memory bank that all peoples supposedly share. Northrop Frye, Joseph Campbell, and others recognized that archetypes appear in art, mythology, and literature and that their analysis offers an avenue for literary criticism (“Archetypal Criticism” 16-18).

According to an online dictionary, the term archetype comes from the Greek and translates as “something molded first as a model” (“Archetype”), so the concept has been explained as a prototype used to produce later models. Once the original archetype has been established, the notion of it becomes a generic type that provides some general expectations of what the subsequent thing should be like; later, new specific details are filled in by the artist or writer. For example, consider the differences among the historic figure of Jesus of Nazareth, the concept of a Christ figure, and the character of Jim Casy from *The Grapes of Wrath*. One was the original; the next is an ideal, a concept, or a blank form, and the third is a distinct character who has Christ-like traits in greater or lesser degrees and has his own individual features, appearance, attitudes, and personality—just as Santiago has in *The Old Man and the Sea*. Subsequent archetypal

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

figures, therefore, retain some of the relevant qualities of the original, while they also exhibit their own unique characteristics.

The concept of an “archetype,” according to an explanation in *Merriam Webster’s Encyclopedia of Literature*, can be applied to a character and his or her traits, thoughts, and actions, like the hero and heroic behavior; to a plot or storyline and its progression, such as a quest, the ensuing journey, and the accomplishment of the goal; or to an image or a symbol and its meaning, such as a sunrise and the hope it inspires (65).

Archetypes that re-appear regularly in fine art or in popular culture seem to have four distinct aspects: They extend beyond the bounds of time and of space, and audiences know what they are and how to react to them. First, archetypes are timeless. The characters are ancient, the stories are primitive, even prehistoric, and the symbols are elemental. Next, archetypes are universal. The characters appear worldwide, the plots are widespread, and the symbolism is wide-reaching. Third, archetypes are recognizable. To one degree or another, audiences recognize the characters and their typical characteristics. They know the way plots are supposed to go—and supposed to end—and they recognize symbols and understand their meanings. Finally, archetypes are evocative. Audiences are able to react to and respond to archetypes in ways that are comfortable and comforting.

This paper, therefore, contends that *The Phantom of the Opera* repeats and reworks some ancient archetypal elements of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Certain aspects of the original novel and a number of its adaptations revive classic characters from the Old Testament and retell their conventional stories.

A Variety of Archetypal Characters

One of the intriguing things about *The Phantom of the Opera* is that each of its main characters is not merely *an* archetypal character, but that each also possesses *a variety* of classic traits and takes on *a number* of conventional roles. What's more fascinating is that many of these characteristics and roles are contradictory to one another. Even Raoul, who is now usually considered the least developed of the characters, began in the novel as a three-dimensional character who exhibited both strengths and weaknesses. The characters of Christine and Erik, as expected, exhibit even more development and depth.

Christine

In a number of versions of the story, including the original novel, Christine is repeatedly depicted as both the Picture of Innocence and a Woman of Strength. She came to the Opera as an orphan, then, as a young unmarried woman, she is the virgin, the maiden. To Erik, she is both his muse and his protégé: She inspires and guides him, and he inspires and guides her. She then goes on from the role of ingénue to achieve the status of diva, but shortly afterward becomes the stereotypical damsel in distress. Instead of being rescued, however, she often offers herself as a sacrificial lamb or martyr, and by doing so, she also becomes a priestess of sorts who shows compassion and mercy and bestows forgiveness.

Considering all these guises, Christine often falls into gender roles that uphold traditional depictions of women, yet she is able to use what are considered innate feminine traits (such as awareness, understanding, and empathy) to control some aspects of her destiny and ultimately to have a revelatory effect on someone.

Raoul

In the novel, it is clear that Raoul is the younger son who is poised to embark on making his way in the world. He has completed his training and is soon to set out on his first real venture (Leroux 15-16). He is an inexperienced young man, and that is to be expected given his age and station in life. He was also something of a momma's boy, so as a callow youth, he is headstrong and hotheaded and an underdog. Raoul is no match for the Phantom. However, he is the long-lost friend, the boy next door, the childhood sweetheart, and her young man. He is also a law-abiding citizen and a would-be hero, so he rises to the status of a romantic figure, and, as an aristocrat, he approaches the status of Prince Charming. Raoul, therefore, is both an ineffectual male and an admirable one.

Erik

The title character exhibits an even wider range of archetypal traits that balance on the far ends of the spectrum. Erik is clearly a victim. The rejection he faced as a disfigured child made him an outcast, an outsider, and a sort of orphan in his own home, so he became a scapegoat and an underdog like Caliban and Quasimodo. However, he is more than a survivor. Superior to most, he is an artist and a genius, and as a loner he becomes a brooding Byronic hero. Once he "adopts" little Christine, he becomes a father figure, and once he begins tutoring her, he becomes the teacher, the mentor, the master. Then, he, too, falls in love with Christine, and offers her something in addition to marriage—passion—and that makes him a bad boy, a seducer, and even a Svengali. Throughout, his appearance casts him as the Other, and he is frequently called a creature, a monster, a thing. Finally, he becomes a perpetrator. He "descends into madness" and, like Richard III, commits heinous, irrevocable crimes. The Ugly Duckling cannot be

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

transformed; the Beast cannot be redeemed in this life, so the Phantom ends up a tragic hero.

Like Christine and Raoul, Erik exhibits a number of archetypal traits that are familiar to most audiences, yet the obvious archetypal qualities of these characters only begin to explain the story's enduring significance. Likewise, the obvious archetypal patterns that these characters repeat are only part of the story's continued appeal—but they are a substantial part.

A Variety of Archetypal Plots and Conflicts

Gaston Leroux needed to fashion more than one kind of character because he crafted more than one kind of story. He wrote a mystery that follows the conventions of having a detective or a reporter investigate the unknown circumstances of a crime to try to solve the case. He wrote a romance that involves the trials and tribulations of a sweet young thing and a dashing young suitor as their young love blossoms, and he wrote a tragedy that positions a larger than life character for a harder than usual fall. The love story, however, is the one that appeals to many audience members. However, Leroux's tale contains more than one love story, and both courtships are interrupted by the intrusion of each male into the other's relationship. Although these love triangles may be the more significant storylines, the other kinds of archetypal romances that are present provide dimension to the stories and perspective for the audience.

Archetypal Romance Plots

Although the generic term “romance” comes from the literary legends of the likes of King Arthur and his kind of swashbuckling Romantic tales, the term now usually refers to a love story, and there are a number of archetypal plotlines that a young couple

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

can follow. In *The Phantom of the Opera*, Erik is involved in a May-December romance; Christine's romance is a Cinderella story, and Raoul's plot progresses from meeting the girl to losing her and then getting her back—and all three, of course, are entangled in a classic love triangle.

Christine's Love Stories

Christine has two different relationships with two different love interests, and her story progresses through three different romantic plots. As a young adult, Christine's first emotional bond is with her Angel of Music, so she is involved in a conventional May-December romance. She is the ingénue; Erik is the more experienced, older, and wiser man. Under his instruction, she is the student, and he is the teacher. The difference in age is complementary at first, but then becomes incompatible in the presence of a youthful peer for Christine. When Raoul arrives, her feelings for him are renewed, and she begins a Cinderella story. Prince Charming enters her life, improves her conditions, and is there to (try to) save her. Christine needs to be rescued (or released) because Raoul's arrival creates the love triangle, and eventually forces her to face her conflict: choosing between the two men—and choosing between the different things they offer. Although title characters are often assumed to be the protagonists, Christine is actually the main character here, so this is her story, and she is the one facing the serious decision. Ultimately, this is her coming of age, and the realizations she has made make this a maturation story, so the happy ending of her romance with Raoul is bittersweet.

Raoul's Love Story

Raoul's love story is the simplest of the three. In many versions, his follows the stereotypical plot line: “boy meets girl, boy gets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl back.”

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

The presence of a rival is the complication that causes him to temporarily lose Christine. In the original novel and in the more familiar adaptations, Raoul and Christine were friends, even sweethearts, as children, and as young adults, their relationship is re-established and their romance is rekindled. Raoul expresses his feelings for Christine, and she usually reciprocates. However, Erik announces his intent, and, through a combination of feeling and force, aligns Christine with himself. Raoul's position is threatened by the presence of a rival, and he loses Christine until she is rescued (or released). Neither the novel nor the more popular versions of the story allow Raoul to become an actual active hero, for the Phantom is the tragic hero of the story.

Erik's Love Stories

In practically every version of the story, Erik is already a mature adult when he presents himself to Christine. In the original novel, the Opera Ghost is certainly old enough to be Christine's father, and that significant age difference is obvious in the 1925 film and in the 1986 and 1988 Lloyd Webber musicals. The situation is actually reworked into "reality" when the Phantom becomes Christine's father in the 1943 film. The 2004 film, however, cast an actor who was in his mid-30s with an actress who was about half his age. Although younger than most of the other Phantoms, this Erik is still the autumn in the May-December romance with Christine, and, although his experience with women has been hampered by his appearance, he is not only older, but he is also wiser in the ways of the world. In the original and in some of the adaptations, he has traveled the world and gained enough knowledge and sophistication that, compared to Christine, he can be considered urbane. Perhaps then his older age is less of a problem

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

than his being wiser and worldlier than Christine: His emotions become self-centered, his morals antisocial, and his behavior unprincipled.

Erik is also a dark Prince Charming (especially in the Lloyd Webber musicals) who is poised to whisk away the Sleeping Beauty or at least awaken her “darker side” as the lyrics of “The Music of the Night” suggest. Adding those sentiments to the ones expressed in the title song, “The Phantom of the Opera,” the image that is created depicts Erik as a man of mystery—a Romantic Byronic hero who embodies pain, power, and even some evil in a combination that is both mesmerizing and terrifying.

Later in the musical, in the scene after the Phantom has committed a murder, Christine first warns Raoul (through lyrics by Charles Hart and Richard Stilgoe) that she realizes the Phantom will continue to kill to have her, yet she also reveals that she is attracted to his unique allure and sympathetic to his pathetic condition. The characters and the audience alike come to realize that Erik has the traits that can attract whomever he wants, but he also has the tragic flaws that will ultimately prevent him from achieving his goal.

Additionally, Erik finds his own romance turned into a triangle when Raoul arrives. Perhaps Christine could have become a loving wife (or a devoted daughter) to the disfigured man with whom she shares a strong connection and a new passion. Perhaps, in light of their love, she could have forgiven his criminal ways; perhaps he could have changed, but Raoul reawakens former feelings in Christine, and Erik lashes out in vengeance and with violence. All that is good in Erik is negated by the bad that he does, and his archetypal story can end only in loss.

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

Who Erik is affects what he does as well as what happens in the story, which is also the case for the other main characters, for characters and plots are closely connected. Traditionally, certain kinds of characters and events are expected in certain kinds of plots. For instance, if a plot introduces either the boy next door *or* a bad boy to a sweet young thing—and introduces only one of them to her—he will probably pursue the girl—until he loses her and has to win her back. If a storyline introduces the boy next door *and* a bad boy to a sweet young thing, she will spend the rest of the story struggling to choose between the two, which is what happens in numerous versions of *Le Fantôme de l'Opéra*. Even in the Claude Rains' film, in which the Phantom is not a love interest, Raoul still is and, as a police detective, faces competition from a new character, a baritone.

The omnipresence of the love triangle in the most familiar texts of the story is the basis of this inquiry and its conclusions: The love triangle's significance appears to come from what the romance shares with the ancient story of a young couple and the intruder who successfully threatened their idyllic life together. Each current character revives and embodies an important archetypal figure and repeats pivotal archetypal events. Each current character reminds us of our divine origins, and each reasserts our human natures, for *The Phantom of the Opera* renews several principal figures from the Old Testament and retells their story for contemporary audiences.

An Archetypal Triangle

Although several kinds of conventional romances are played out in *The Phantom of the Opera*, the love triangle is perhaps the most telling. Like traditional love triangles, a happy young couple is threatened by the arrival of an interloper. As in most fictional heterosexual love triangles, the newcomer is male, so the woman is the one who faces a

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

choice between suitors. Likewise, the suitors are quite different—even opposites—so the woman must choose not only between potential mates, but also between men who exhibit opposite traits and, therefore, embody opposing values. Hers never seems to be a choice between both of the boys next door; it always seems to be a choice between the cowboy in the white hat or the one in black or, in Christine’s case, between the man who stands in the light or the one who hides in the darkness. Such symbolic imagery is appropriate since *Le Fantôme de l’Opéra* re-enacts the Biblical story of the Temptation and the Fall, and its love triangle re-creates that ancient plot: the one in which the existence of Adam and Eve is endangered by the interference of the Serpent.

A Biblical Archetypal Plot: The Temptation and The Fall

If you’ll recall the Genesis story, God had placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden with only one restriction: Although they could eat from the other trees, which presumably included the tree of life, they were not to eat from “the tree of the knowledge of good and bad,” and the consequences of doing so were being “doomed to die” (*New American Bible*, Gen. 2.16-17). However, the Serpent entered their relationship and led Eve to eat the fruit, which she shared with Adam, who rather passively accepted her offer (Gen. 3.1-6). Once they gained “the knowledge of good and bad,” they recognized that they were naked and seemed to feel shame for the first time (Gen. 3.7). Upon realizing their disobedience, God banished Adam and Eve from Eden and placed angels at the entrance to prevent them from returning and eating the fruit of the tree of life and being able to live forever (Gen. 3.11, 22-24).

The tree of life and the tree of knowledge were the two unique features in the Garden of Eden: One sustained life (and seemingly guaranteed it) and one provided

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

knowledge. Consequently, two relevant conclusions can be drawn about the situation. First, if Adam and Eve were unconscious of their condition—their nudity, their physical differences, and their sexual nature—before their fall, then they were animal-like—instinctual and unselfconscious—or they were childlike—innocent and unaware. At best, they were children and not adults; at worst, they were animals and not human.

Second, if God prevented Adam and Eve from eating the fruit of the tree of life so that they would not live forever (Gen. 3.22), then their ability to eat that fruit before their fall meant they would not die, so they would have been able to live forever. That meant Adam and Eve were immortal, which meant they were eternal and even divine by human standards. Their well-known origins also demonstrate that they were not of typical human conception and birth. Again, whether “merely” immortal or actually divine, they were not human.

In both regards, before the temptation, they were not fully human (or at least not fully adult in one case). It was only after their fall—when they lost their unselfconsciousness, their innocence, and their immortality and when they gained knowledge, awareness, and mortality—that they became truly human (and truly adult). Although it might be better to be immortal or divine than to be human—or it might be worse—being human is indeed preferable to being an animal (just as becoming an adult is preferable to remaining a child). The consequences of the Temptation and the resulting Fall from Grace were monumental, but they were also the blessings that gave us humans our humanity.

Likewise, the descent of Christine from the lights of the Opera House to the darkness of the cellars below parallels Eve’s journey from Eden into the real world,

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

provides the character with new insights, and offers the audience a reaffirmation of our intrinsic humanity.

Biblical Parallels

When the details of Leroux's novel and those of several of the subsequent adaptations are considered, a number of specific parallels can be identified between the Parisian characters and the Genesis figures. A number of comparisons can be drawn between the love story of Christine and Raoul and the temptation story of Adam and Eve. In addition, quite a few corresponding features are shared by the Phantom and the Serpent. These parallels, which are particularly visible in the original novel and in the Lloyd Webber musical adaptations, have been organized here in seven categories.

The Settings

One of the initial similarities between the story in the Paris Opera House and the one in the Garden of Eden is the nature of their settings. Throughout the novel, Leroux depicts the theater as a grand structure that houses a microcosm of peoples. Many adaptations also replicate the magnificence of the theater as well as the dark underworld of the Phantom, and the 1925 and 2004 films also do particularly well at including the workings backstage, overhead, and underground. Within the enormous building, people live and work above hellish dungeons and below celestial skies (which in the 2004 film is beautifully depicted on the ceiling of the Opéra Populaire, as it is known in the Lloyd Webber versions). In short, the perfection of Eden, the self-sufficiency of Adam and Eve in their kingdom, and the presence of Heaven above and Hell below are all represented in the world of the Paris Opera House.

The Main Characters and Their Roles

The structure of the relationships among the three main characters is, of course, an obvious parallel between the contemporary stories and their ancient prototype. Both plots involve innocent young lovers who seem predestined for each other (or who actually were), and both conflicts arise because of the suggestions of a questionable outsider.

Christine and Raoul had been, to a degree, childhood sweethearts. In the novel, Raoul, as an attendee of the Opera, becomes aware of the grown Christine. In the Lloyd Webber versions, Raoul re-enters Christine's life when he becomes the patron of the Opera. When Christine first sees him, she is depicted as remembering him wistfully, as if she still has romantic feelings for him, and when Raoul recognizes her, he sees both a brilliant young performer and the girl from his past—and he acts immediately to become reacquainted with her.

In their minds, and in the minds of the audience as well, Christine and Raoul are a couple. In fact, they are *the* couple in question. For contemporary American audiences in particular, Christine and Raoul appear perfect for one another: Their ages are closer, which seems more appropriate. Their interests are aligned: He is the patron, and she is the diva. Their "stations" are also similar: He's an aristocrat, and she's a star. Most important, they can be seen as each other's first love, so having the chance to rekindle their romance seems like their romantic destiny—as if they were meant for each other just as Adam and Eve were made for one another.

However, readers and audiences alike also know that Christine and Erik share a strong bond, but its nature is unknown. What draws the young woman and the Phantom

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

together? Is it the history of his being her Angel of Music for some ten years that they have together? Is it her associating him, as the Angel of Music, with her late father, who promised to send such a guardian? Is it the love of music that they share? Is it a passion—for music or for each other—that they share? Erik has a unique bond with Christine, and, although Raoul seems perfect for her, Erik does, too, in some ways, so he is a true rival, and, like the Serpent, he presents a genuine threat to the status quo.

According to the Bible stories, the Serpent has no previous relationship with Eve, but he does engage her, as the Phantom engages the girl. The Serpent presents new ideas to Eve, and he allows her to think for herself—which are behaviors and expectations that the Phantom repeats with Christine. With the two men competing for her attentions, the young woman is the one presented with choices and facing decisions. Like Eve, she is given an option to choose and an opportunity to decide for herself.

While there are several parallels between the relationships of the female characters and their young men, the corollaries between the Phantom and the Serpent are even more striking. Numerous references in the novel, in other adaptations, and in the libretto to the 1986 Lloyd Webber musical describe the Phantom in evil terms.

To begin, although both figures actually have names (Erik and Lucifer respectively), *Le Fantôme* texts often refer to the main character by the descriptive title of “the Phantom,” just as Genesis refers to the intruder by the descriptive title of “the Serpent.” Lucifer has also come to be known as the Urbane Serpent, a term that reflects his worldly, sophisticated ways, which have been replicated in Erik. In addition, the Serpent from Genesis has come to be interpreted as Satan, and Erik is referred to as Satan in a number of places in the novel. At a few points in the Lloyd Webber musical, the

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

Phantom is depicted as both as an angel from Heaven and a resident of Hell. Lucifer, of course, is known as the Fallen Angel who lives in Hell. Lucifer is also identified as the devil, who claims some souls after death, and in various versions of the story, Erik disguises himself as a costumed character with the descriptive title of the Red Death, which employs the symbolic association between the color and the devil. Finally, Erik is repeatedly called the Opera Ghost, another descriptive designation (rather than a name) and another connection with death, darkness, and evil.

In short, Raoul can be seen as Adam, the rather inactive, ineffectual boy next door. Christine shares Eve's dilemma—being tempted by a force of darkness—and the Phantom parallels the Serpent as the instigator. Both Raoul and Adam have legitimate social alliances with their partners as well as true emotional bonds with them, and both Christine and Eve have to make decisions and choose between what is seen as right and wrong. The men's roles and their relationships are threatened by the interference of an intruder: The Phantom reincarnates the Serpent in these modern retellings, and, like his predecessor, he offers the woman something new, something different, and something unknown.

The Forgotten Fourth Characters

Although both the Garden of Eden relationship and the Opera House love triangle involve three primary characters, each of these stories actually includes a fourth figure whose words set up the conflict and whose expectations determine the consequences.

Of course, God the Father is the figure who brought Adam and Eve together and who prohibited them from eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge. As the Biblical story

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

goes, his expectation of obedience was followed by his punishment for their disobedience.

Just as God the Father made Eve for Adam, in the Leroux story and in several adaptations of it, “Daddy Daae,” as Christine’s father is referred to in the novel (47), made it possible for Christine to attract Raoul. Christine’s father is the one whose talent as a musician positioned the girl in a place to meet the young aristocrat, and her father’s stories and dying words also led Christine to believe in the Angel of Music. The beneficent guardian that the father had created in his child’s mind later allows her to accept Erik’s mysterious coaching and then consider his offers of music, sexuality, and passion—even after she has rekindled her young love with Raoul. When Christine struggles with the presence of both the acceptable Raoul and the outlaw Phantom in her life, she goes to her father’s grave to ask for guidance, strength, and forgiveness. Consequently, her father’s influence divides Christine’s allegiance and complicates her decision, which is nicely depicted in the Lloyd Webber versions. Most of all, these adaptations reveal the father’s expectation that his adult daughter think for herself and act for herself, which ultimately bring about her greatest conflict and her greatest growth.

Another parallel, therefore, exists between the two stories. Around each triangle hovers the presence and authority of a fourth party: the Biblical Father or the patriarchal one whose expectations influence some of each woman’s conflict and solution.

The Temptations and The Prizes

This conflict—the decision making, the need to reason, and the ability to think things through—falls to the women in these stories. Compliance seems to be the attitude and the behavior of the boys next door. Indeed, in the more familiar *Phantom* texts, the

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

male heroes comply with the social expectations of their situations. Adam abides by the Word of God, and Raoul abides by the law of man. Not only does Adam obey God, he seems to obey Eve as well, and such behavior can make him seem like a passive or weak character, which is how Raoul is often depicted: lacking insight, resources, and fortitude.

However, the female characters are actually the stronger, more independent ones. Eve was the one who questioned God's word after considering what the Serpent said: "The woman saw that the tree was good for food, pleasing to the eyes, and desirable for gaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it" (Gen. 3.4-6). The whole point of giving in to temptation, of course, is to go after the thing that is being denied, and that thing is being withheld because it is of some value. Rather than passively succumbing to temptation, Eve consciously and actively decided to proceed. She realized for herself that acting on her own would gain her practical, esthetic, and intellectual benefits.

Likewise, Christine is the one who sees value in what the Phantom has to offer. In numerous texts of the story, Christine has come to know her Angel of Music, so she is usually receptive, to one degree or another, to his actual presence in her life, which is well-depicted in the 2004 Schumacher film. She also finds his underground world—and being in it herself—both frightening and fascinating. The familiar lyrics of "The Music of the Night," originally written by Hart and Stilgoe for the stage musical, vividly depict all that the Phantom is offering Christine, and the set of the Phantom's chambers in the 2004 movie creates an otherworldly space that amazes the young woman. Readers of the novel, viewers of these musical adaptations especially, and Christine herself all recognize

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

that choosing to yield to these temptations will have its rewards: a shared love of music, a shared enjoyment of sexuality, and a shared passion for each other.

The Last Two Parallels: Knowledge and Its Consequences

While it is important that both of these female figures are allowed by others to choose for themselves—and that both of them decide themselves to choose for themselves—it is equally important that these women grasped various rewards for themselves: The greatest of which is the knowledge they gained.

In the prototype, Adam and Eve’s “knowledge of good and bad” was the recognition of the physical differences between themselves, which led to their awareness of their sexuality and to their feelings of self-consciousness, which is actually consciousness, which in turn signifies their inherent humanity (and ours as well). Likewise, the punishments for gaining such knowledge included being exiled from an idyllic (or heavenly) place and being forced to (resign their immortality and) face mortality. In other words, Adam and Eve were “sentenced” to being human.

Also, the Serpent enticed Eve into trying the food that was prohibited and that has come to be called “the forbidden fruit.” The contemporary parallel, which is again especially well-done in the Lloyd Webber show and film, is that the Phantom entices Christine into trying something likewise forbidden to her: passion—passion for something and, ideally, passion for someone. His fervor for music and his desire that she share its transformative nature with him are skillfully captured in the lyrics of “The Music of the Night.” Filled with sensory details, the song is both a request for Christine to share Erik’s passion for music and an invitation to share sexual passion with him.

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

Although the song is rightly read as a song of seduction, the lyrics should be interpreted as being about more than sex, for the Phantom is not experienced in that way. The novel and the musicals in particular imply that his appearance has prevented him from any physical contact with a woman before Christine. Likewise, in the 1943 film, the Phantom, who is the young woman's father, is not trying to seduce her. Thus, these embodiments of the Phantom must want something else from Christine. The Phantom, even if he is inexperienced in matters of seduction, is quite familiar with the emotion of passion, for the Phantom is consistently described as a genius who has devoted much of his life to music. Furthermore, his character is repeatedly depicted as one who is capable of becoming so passionate that he becomes obsessed, and obsession can be considered as the greatest degree of passion.

While Eve gained the awareness of human sexuality, Christine learns of sexuality—and more. She gains the knowledge of the existence of passion—an ardor that is deeper and wider than flirtation, affection, and even love. In a variety of the texts, Christine's "knowledge of good and bad," then, is the recognition of the emotional differences between Raoul and Erik. With Raoul, her first love, she has romance, fondness, and perhaps love, but there is little to suggest that what either feels is passion. With the Phantom, her first lover (so to speak), Christine's sexual awakening is heightened with an awareness of the nature of passion—which is a uniquely human emotion that consequently reaffirms the inherent humanity that we received from Eve. Christine comes to realize in her mind that there is more than the romance and love of the heart *and* there is more than the desire and sexuality of the body; when both love and sexuality unite, there can be the exquisite passion of the soul.

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

Moreover, once Christine recognizes the distinctions between love and sexuality and between romance and passion, she suffers the “punishment” of feeling conflicted. She in some ways comes to doubt and question what Raoul has to offer her, which is socially acceptable and religiously sanctified marriage, and in other ways comes to consider what Erik offers, especially in the popular musicals, which is unfamiliar, unspoken passion. Like Eve, Christine is approaching the time when she must decide between two different men and the different values they represent. She will have to align herself with one or the other, and, in doing so, she will face breaking the bonds of the triangle. Recognizing differences and being conflicted about one choice or another, however, is only the surface of Christine’s first predicament, for Christine now has to resolve her own issues. Propriety or passion: She has to choose for herself.

Personal Agency and Individual Destiny

Neither Adam as a silent servant of God nor Raoul as the voice of the patriarchy gives his mate many choices. Adam expects Eve to comply with the authority of God, and Raoul expects Christine to conform to the social norms of their times. Both Eve and Christine, then, begin with less personal agency than they come to want.

In addition, although there is only one pivotal choice for Eve, Christine is actually presented with two opportunities to decide for herself. Just as the Serpent makes his argument and thereby presents an option for Eve to consider, the Phantom, especially in the Lloyd Webber musicals, initially extends an invitation to Christine to consider “the music of the night.” The Phantom describes the life of music, sexuality, and passion that the two of them could share together, yet leaves the actual decision to Christine.

Raoul, however, is far more decisive and direct. In the novel, he continually chases after Christine. In the 1925 film, he plans to take her away with him. In the 1943 movie, he pursues her with the intent to marry, and in the musicals, he offers marriage and presses for a public engagement. In these versions, Christine's interest in what Raoul offers her varies as does her ability to be heard by her young man, which affects the amount of personal agency she actually has.

In addition, Leroux and a number of his successors themselves also limit the amount of personal agency that Christine actually needs, for the more familiar versions of the story repeatedly deny her the opportunity to choose between the man and the monster, which would have been scandalous in 1910 and perhaps improbable even in 2012. If Erik were only hideously disfigured, she could possibly get beyond his appearance and choose passion over propriety (especially since he usually offers marriage in addition to passion). In many versions of the story, by the time Christine realizes all that Erik offers her, he has gone mad and has already committed murder, which is very possibly the real "point of no return" (to borrow a dramatic phrase from the musical) (qtd. in Perry 166). Christine may now be aware of the difference between affectionate love and emotional passion, but the virginal antagonist is challenged by an antagonist who has no chance of being chosen: Christine herself will not choose to take the hand of the criminal Other.

Consequently, in the original novel and in the more familiar adaptations, the circumstances of Christine's decision must be such that they prevent it from being a willing choice. The Phantom has to prolong his villainy and present yet another complication for the protagonist. Although the narratives allow Erik to give Christine a

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

second occasion to choose him, the situation is always so desperate that her choice will be the lesser of two evils, a cliché that aptly fits the events.

The climatic scene often involves Christine making a decision that will not only determine her fate but the fate of others as well. Since the circumstances force her to choose the Phantom, she herself is not choosing to choose him. In the novel, Erik not only gives Christine the option to marry him, but he also gives her the chance to reject him, although both alternatives are miserable ones: Christine has to decide whether to become his wife (even though both his appearance and his actions repulse her) or to reject him and indirectly cause the death of everyone in the Opera House. In one tense scene, Christine explains the Phantom's plan to Raoul, which reveals the agony of her decision:

...Erik had gone quite mad with love and...he had decided *to kill everybody and himself with everybody* if she did not consent to become his wife. He had given her till eleven o'clock the next evening for reflection. It was the last respite. She must choose, as he said, between the wedding mass and the requiem. (Leroux 211)

By having the Phantom coerce Christine into choosing him, Leroux and his predecessors make Christine a victim and thereby absolve her of any willingness in what would be an unthinkable match. However, while the plot is contrived to force the protagonist to sacrifice herself, two other things are happening—intentionally or not.

First, even though these are unbearable choices, they are choices nonetheless, and the condition of being presented with options, even entirely negative ones, by a male character allows the female figure to exercise some agency for herself and to have some

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

control over her own destiny. The plot that seems to uphold patriarchal ideals begins to fulfill feminine needs—if not yet feminist values.

As in the original tale, the Phantom of the musicals also gives Christine choices, albeit miserable ones, but he does give her the chance to decide for herself. In the scene after he has ensnared Raoul in a noose, he addresses the young man first, then Christine:

Nothing can save you [Raoul] now—

except perhaps Christine...

Start a new life with me—

Buy his freedom with your love!

Refuse me, and you send your lover to his death!

This is the choice—

This is the point of no return!” (Hart and Stilgoe qtd. in Perry 166)

The Phantom again gives Christine the ability to choose. She may choose her freedom at the cost of Raoul’s life, or she may decide to save Raoul’s life at the cost of her freedom. Another lose-lose situation, but a decision, nevertheless, that the Victorian-era character gets to make for herself—and a decision that involves not only her consideration of Raoul and herself, but also some consideration of Erik, which leads to the second outcome of the exaggerated characterization of the Phantom.

Just as being forced to choose means getting to choose, being forced to face the monster in the man also means facing the man in the monster. Christine’s association with Erik, the Other, has developed other-centeredness in her, and she is able to empathize with him. Both the novel and the libretto each demonstrate that Christine’s agonizing decision is tempered by the consideration that she shows for Erik: In the

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

novel, her display of compassion comes after her decision; in the musical, it is revealed as she makes her choice. She may no longer be able to share deep passion with him, but she is now able to feel great compassion for him.

Ultimately, both the prototype Eve and Christine, her modern-day counterpart, are able to exert some control over fate and over their individual destinies. In the process, Christine exerts some agency for herself and also feels some concern and consideration for another (who is no longer just the Other to her or to audiences)—and faces her second predicament, for this archetypal figure not only comes to gain the additional knowledge of the concept of “both/and,” but she also experiences the uncomfortable reality of it.

The Knowledge of Both Good and Bad Together

The first thing that Christine learned once the Phantom actually entered her life was an awareness of the existence of passion. If Erik had been only ardent, choosing him (the sexual Other) instead of Raoul might have been easy, but Christine, a representation of all daughters of the dominant culture, cannot be allowed to choose passion over propriety, so the Phantom must be characterized as especially evil. In addition to being the monstrous Other born with a death’s head on his shoulders (Leroux 5), Erik develops an insanely violent nature and becomes the criminal Other. As the Outlaw, he compels Christine to confront the duality of his true nature: The Angel of Music is now both saint and sinner.

This brings Christine to her second revelation, which also originates in the Book of Genesis where the language and the events are revealing. In the Garden of Eden, the problematic tree is identified as “the tree of the knowledge of good and bad” (Gen. 2.17). Eve came to realize for herself that the tree was attractive to look at and offered food for

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

the body and knowledge for the mind. Because she acted for herself, she later learned that sampling from the tree also brought about negative consequences. Therefore, Eve gained “the knowledge of good *and* bad” as Scripture literally said. The tree and its fruit were actually good, but had been labeled “bad.” Eating the fruit was beneficial, but disobedience was detrimental, so Eve discovered that it is not necessarily a case of “right *or* wrong” because a thought, an action, or a thing can be equally right *and* wrong—again just as Scripture said.

However, even though Scripture uses the conjunction “and,” we think—and we speak—in binary opposites, which is a concept that was developed by Ferdinand de Saussure and is primary within the principles of Structuralism. We humans have come to recognize the existence of contradictory yet complementary conditions, such as day and night, so we logically link such things together to form pairs that are connected yet contrary. We have also come to include a value judgment with most pairings, so we typically privilege one over the other, such as male over female.

Consequently, we have come to restate the Biblical phrase of “good *and* bad” as “good *or* bad” and reinterpret the concept as meaning “*either* good *or* bad” with goodness privileged over badness. In addition, we usually see goodness and badness as individual traits existing independently from one another. We identify people or characters and their thoughts or actions as *either* good *or* bad.

Furthermore, we audiences recognize the classic, even archetypal, narrative conflict between good *and* evil, yet we expect that *either* good *or* evil will prevail at the climax—depending on the genre and its conventions. However, the story by Gaston Leroux, like *Jane Eyre* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, presents the ancient concept of

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

“both/and,” which asserts that many situations are more complex than being “*either* right *or* wrong.”

In effect, the characters who began as descendants of Old Testament figures have evolved into representations of the New Testament concept of “both/and,” whose explanation is grounded in Christian teachings. Some examples of situations that seem incompatible but are actually complementary come from Felix Just, a Jesuit priest. Such teachings hold that the Lord God is “*both* Almighty Creator *and* Loving Father.” Jesus Christ is “*both* Fully Divine *and* Fully Human,” and the Church is “*both* a Divine Mystery *and* a Human Institution.” Unlike the principle of binary opposites, within these pairs, neither of the facts is excluded from the other, and none is privileged more than the other. The concept of “both/and,” then, negotiates between incongruities in a situation (which are conditions that are usually seen as “either/or”) and reconciles them by acknowledging and accepting them both, which is what Christine must do regarding her relationship with the Phantom.

Appropriately, as the Other, monstrous, sexual, and criminal, the Phantom is the antagonist of the story and is even considered an actual villain (an antagonist who revels in his villainy), so he is seen as evil by almost every character other than Christine, for she first knew of him as the Angel of Music, who is both a symbol of goodness and an agent of good for the girl. Once Christine gains a knowledge of Erik as the monstrous Other (whose suffering has been as great as his appearance is shocking), she also gains a sense of other-consciousness that compares to—as well as contrasts with—the self-consciousness of Eve’s. Such other-consciousness, which operates both inside and outside herself, finally leads to her true internal conflict. Again, Christine has the

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

opportunity to choose for herself—in this case, to decide how she will regard the Phantom and whether she will consider him good or bad—or both. She also has the opportunity to decide for herself where she will stand in relation to notions of goodness and badness. For instance, in the Lloyd Webber musical, Raoul announces his plan to entrap the Phantom by having Christine sing in the opera that the Phantom has written, and Christine considers her situation. The lyrics that she sings succinctly refer to both Erik's former benevolence to her as well as his current malevolence, and they aptly describe her profound inner conflict:

Twisted every way,
what answer can I give?...
Can I betray the man,
who once inspired my voice?
Do I become his prey?
Do I have any choice?...
I know I can't refuse,
and yet, I wish I could... (Hart and Stilgoe qtd. in Perry 159)

Although social norms and common sense compel Christine to realize that her choice is really a non-choice, she first considers the Phantom, the situation, and the predictable, regrettable outcome. She realizes that doing the right thing for them will mean committing a wrong against the Phantom. She realizes that she cannot protect herself and bring justice to their community unless she deceives someone she cares about, someone who has been good to her, and someone who is not entirely bad. Ultimately, Christine has to struggle with reconciling the conflicting, contradictory things that she

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

knows are both equally valid: Erik is both friend and foe, and her own actions will bring about both heartache and liberation.

As a maturing adult, Christine now recognizes that the situation is complex, her options are problematic, and her decision will be difficult. Like Eve, her archetypal ancestress, Christine has gained “the knowledge of good and bad”; moreover, she has also gained the realization that it is the knowledge of *both good and bad existing together*, for her decision will bring about both positive and negative consequences because the Phantom is *both good and evil*.

It is indeed a case of *both good and bad existing together*: Both righteousness and wickedness reside within the Phantom: He is a genius, a guardian, and a loved one, yet his passion grows to obsession, and that descends into madness, which results in violent, criminal behavior. If Erik were only evil, Christine would be able to resist him; it is because he is also good that she faces a profound inner conflict. The conflict for the protagonist is so much more than choosing between two suitors: She must choose to reject someone she has loved (the Angel of Music he has been to her) or accept someone she has reason to hate (the murderer he has become). As the protagonist, Christine faces not only the external conflict of comparing and contrasting suitors; she also faces the internal one involving her own values and actions.

Moreover, this repetition of “both/and” in *Le Fantôme* stories fully establishes in Christine another distinctively human trait: the ability to empathize with others. Since she has developed a sense of other-consciousness, she is able to do more than sympathize with Erik and feel sorry for him. She is now able to recognize and understand what another human being is feeling or thinking and then appreciate those emotions or

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

perspectives as real and as valid—even if they are incongruent with her own. Because of that, she is able to feel true sorrow for Erik and his plight, and we audiences are reminded of our unique ability to identify with others and feel compassion for them. Had the Phantom been either good or bad, he would never have embodied the notion of “both/and” or reflected our human capacity for compassion. Perhaps, then, the Phantom is a successful fictional character because he can be read as the personification of the concept of “both/and.” Like other tragic figures in literature, Erik is usually depicted as a character who possesses both the best of human traits and the worst.

As the story ends, Christine comes to realize that she cannot absolve Erik of his most serious crimes, yet she can empathize with his heartbreaking situation and forgive his desperate acts. Christine comes to see him as a pathetic figure—not a pitiful or pitiable one, but one deserving of empathy or *pathos* in the fuller rhetorical sense of the word. Erik deals with his own unique assortment of personal concerns. He holds a variety of individual values, and he experiences a range of private human emotions—ones that Christine comes to recognize and accept. What he needs is valid; how he goes about fulfilling those needs, however, is not, and Christine realizes and comes to accept both. Once she shows the Phantom the compassion that he has been denied, he himself is able to feel compassion for another, and Eve’s legacy continues to evolve. Perhaps Christine’s empathy for Erik—and his for her—is another reason why audiences are so sympathetic to the Phantom. We see in their treatment of each other how we would hope to treat others—and how we would hope to be treated ourselves.

Perhaps, then, the audience’s recognition of Christine’s discovery and expression of the uniquely human emotion of empathy is another important cultural reaffirmation of

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

our inherent humanity—which just might be the greater significance of the story of the Phantom of the opera, for in Christine’s response to his tragic condition, we find hope for ourselves.

It could easily be said that the appeal of *The Phantom of the Opera* is because the story is all about passion. Set in the grandeur of the Paris Opera, the story is as dramatic as an opera: It revolves around the tragic relationship between a disfigured phantom of a man and an angelic young lady who is also being romanced by her own Prince Charming. With the addition of striking music and theatrical special effects, the passion of the pages has been vividly brought to life on the stage—yet the story is about so much more.

Although the Andrew Lloyd Webber musicals are the most famous versions of the story, the contributions of the original novel deserve more attention, for Gaston Leroux crafted a tale that is worthy of numerous interpretations. When read as a work that repeats ancient archetypal characters and patterns, its enduring cultural significance is that it reaffirms our inherent humanity. The narrative elements that reflect the Garden of Eden triangle in the Old Testament have evolved from an awareness of sexuality to a recognition of passion and from thoughts of passion to feelings of compassion. The self-consciousness and mortality that granted us our humanity after the Fall have been transformed, by our connection to the Other, into the other-consciousness and empathy of New Testament teachings. The story, then, is truly about both passion and compassion: It reminds us that passion is something we feel for ourselves, within ourselves, and that compassion is something we feel outside of ourselves for another. It also reminds us that being human is really about being humane.

Works Cited

- “Adaptations of *The Phantom of the Opera*.” *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation. 18 Jan. 2013. Web. 21 Jan. 2013.
- Andrew Lloyd Webber’s The Phantom of the Opera*. Dir. Joel Schumacher. Perf. Gerard Butler, Emmy Rossum, Patrick Wilson. Warner Brothers, 2005. DVD.
- Andrew Lloyd Webber’s The Phantom of the Opera at the Royal Albert Hall*. Dir. Laurence Connor and Nick Morris. Perf. Ramin Karimloo, Sierra Boggess, Hadley Fraser. Universal, 2011. DVD.
- “Archetypal Criticism.” *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 10th ed. 2012. Print.
- “Archetype.” *Merriam Webster’s Encyclopedia of Literature*. 1995. Print.
- “Archetype.” *Oxford Dictionaries*. 2012. Web. 24 Oct. 2012.
- The Brilliant Original Phantom of the Opera*. The Really Useful Group of Companies, 2013. Web. 27 Jan. 2013.
- Fraser, Hadley. “Re: Questions for Hadley Fraser.” Message to the author. 16 Oct. 2012. E-mail.
- “Gothic.” *Merriam Webster’s Encyclopedia of Literature*. 1995. Print.
- Hall, Ann C. *Phantom Variations: The Adaptations of Gaston Leroux’s Phantom of the Opera, 1925 to the Present*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009. Print.
- Hogle, Jerrold E. *The Undergrounds of The Phantom of the Opera: Sublimation and the Gothic in Leroux’s Novel and Its Progeny*. New York: Palgrave, 2002. Print.
- “Horror Story.” *Merriam Webster’s Encyclopedia of Literature*. 1995. Print.
- Just, Felix. “The Essential Key to Christian Theology: Both/And, not either/or.”

The Phantom of the Opera: Spectacular Musical or Archetypal Story?

- Catholic Resources for Bible, Liturgy, Art, and Theology*. Catholic Resources. 31 Oct. 2012. Web. 21 Jan. 2013.
- Laemmle, Carla. "Carla Laemmle Remembers: A Video Interview with David Skal." *The Phantom of the Opera: The Ultimate Edition*. Dir. Rupert Julian. Image Entertainment, 2003. DVD.
- Leroux, Gaston. *The Phantom of the Opera*. n. trans. New York: The Modern Library, 2002. Print.
- "*Love Never Dies* (musical)." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation. 16 Jan. 2013. Web. 21 Jan. 2013
- The New American Bible*. 1972-73 ed. Wichita, KS: Catholic Bible Publishers, 1970. Print.
- Perry, George. *The Complete Phantom of the Opera*. New York: Henry Holt, 1987. Print.
- Phantom of the Opera: Classic Monster Collection*. Dir. Arthur Lubin. Perf. Claude Rains, Nelson Eddy, Susanna Foster. Universal, 2000. DVD.
- "*The Phantom of the Opera*." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation. 18 Jan. 2013. Web. 21 Jan. 2013.
- "*The Phantom of the Opera at the Royal Albert Hall*." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation. 6 Jan. 2013. Web. 21 Jan. 2013.
- The Phantom of the Opera: The Ultimate Edition*. Dir. Rupert Julian. Perf. Lon Chaney, Mary Philbin, Norman Kerry. Image Entertainment, 2003. DVD.
- "The Show: Facts and Figures." *The Brilliant Original Phantom of the Opera*. The Really Useful Group of Companies. 2012. Web. 23 Oct. 2012.