

Erik was a Feminist:

The Feminism of Gaston Leroux's *The Phantom of the Opera* and How it was Lost

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Introduction

Viewing social values through the lens of the gothic genre has been a staple in popular culture for the past two centuries, ranging from critically-acclaimed novels to campy slasher films. The gothic stories we find most significant have been adapted over and over, but unfortunately the stories can be completely altered by the most popular adaptation, regardless of consistency with the original themes or even relevance to current social values.

Over the past century, there have been countless adaptations of Gaston Leroux's novel *The Phantom of the Opera* in film and television, on stage, and in other novels from all over the world. The story always features pure-hearted heroine in peril, Christine Daae, a monster that wishes to corrupt her, Erik or the Phantom, and a goodhearted although slightly incompetent hero to rescue her, sometimes named Raoul —typical gothic melodrama. However, the features that make this story endure are also the features that cause its revival in times of women's civil rights struggles: the main conflict for Christine is the choice between a man who wants her to have a career and a man who wants her to be a housewife.

In Gaston Leroux's novel, the phantom does not wish to corrupt or dominate Christine sexually. When he first kidnaps her and brings her to his home across the underground lake, Erik kneels before her in contrition. Christine relates to Raoul:

He accuses himself, he curses himself, he implores my forgiveness! He confesses his cheat. He loves me! He lays at my feet an immense and tragic love.... But he

respects me: he crawls, he moans, he weeps! And when I stood up, Raoul, and told him that I could only despise him if he did not then and there give me liberty...he offered it...he offered to show me the mysterious road...Only...only he rose too...and I was made to remember that although he was not an angel, nor a ghost, nor a genius, he remained the voice [that tutored Christine, and made her successful] ...for he sang. And I listened...and stayed! (Leroux 166)

Then in the climax, when he forces her to choose between marrying him and killing them all by blowing up the theatre, he tells her that should she marry him, “You will be the happiest of women. And we will sing, all by ourselves, till we swoon away with delight...If you loved me I should be as gentle as a lamb; and you could do anything with me that you pleased” (Leroux 286). Here, Erik reminds her of their singing, the art that brought them together in the common goal of promoting her career, but more telling, he offers to be the subservient one in the relationship. Even when he kidnapped her and was in control, he made himself physically inferior to her, and gave her the power by asking for forgiveness. If he wanted to corrupt her sexually, he had plenty of opportunities, including moments of her unconsciousness, but he didn’t. Erik wants her love, and for that, he is willing to be the subservient one, the one who supports the other’s career—he is willing to be the wife.

In the gothic tradition, the novel demonstrates extreme advantages and disadvantages for committing social taboos: the message is, “if you want to have a career, you’ll end up with a scary, abnormal husband like this.” Christine having a man in her life who supported her career was still very progressive, and the first film adaptations retained this message, especially Lubin’s adaptation, which while it takes liberties with the story, extends the feminist options for Christine by adding an additional viable suitor who wants her to have a career. However, the feminism of the original story is generally lost today because of the most popular adaptation, Andrew Lloyd Webber’s musical. Several adaptations after this musical reincorporate the original message,

including the 1989 film starring Robert Englund and the 1990 NBC miniseries based on Arthur Kopit and Maury Yeston's stageplay, both of which humanize the phantom and completely replace Raoul with heroes that support Christine's career. However none have become nearly as well-known, despite Webber's musical no longer reflecting current social values. Even in the 2004 film adaptation of Webber's musical, the nameless "Phantom" bullies and controls Christine instead of devoting himself to her and her career. Consequently, what originally made *The Phantom of the Opera* matter has vanished from the canon of popular culture.

Julian's 1925 Phantom of the Opera

The earliest surviving *Phantom of the Opera* adaptation is the Rupert Julian film, which is very close to the novel, especially in the use of gothic spectacle (the extent of Erik's deformity, large mass of performers, large scale replicas of the Palais Garnier, and the color-tinted masquerade scene). While Erik in the end shifts slightly more towards a dominating gothic villain, the meaning of the story is not altered. This adaptation was made in the middle of the flapper movement, as is evident in the masquerade scene, and after women were finally allowed to vote. As Leroux's novel was written during the world-wide Women's Suffrage movement, this film was created in an atmosphere closer to the original story than any other adaptation, which is reflected in the power of the female characters.

When Christine and Raoul first speak, there is an immediate focus on Christine's career and Raoul's desire that she quit and marry him. She tells him, "I can never leave the Opera, Raoul. You must forget our love" (Julian). He exits, both of them dejected. However, then her room grows dark, and "a melodious voice, like the voice of an angel, spoke to her" (Julian). She listens ecstatically, clasping her hands in obedient worship. The voice tells her,

Christine, tonight I put the world at your feet! ...To you I have imparted the full measure of my art. You will triumph—all Paris will worship you! ...But I warn you, you must forget all worldly things and think only of your career—and your Master! ...Soon, Christine, this spirit will take form and command your love! (Julian). She answers, “Call for me when you will. I shall be waiting,” and at the next night’s performance, Christine sends Raoul a note that he must never attempt to see her again (Julian). As in the novel, Christine is seduced by the hope of a career, and by a creature that would support her ambition.

After she eventually sees her masked teacher, Christine shrinks back in fright. Erik tells her, “Look not upon my mask—think rather of my devotion which has brought you the gift of song” (Julian). Using words like “devotion” and “gift,” Erik is telling her not to fear the frightening and mysterious challenges of a life focused on a career, but to consider the more enlightened and spiritual benefits of pursuing her passion. He is not trying to bully her into serving him, like Webber’s Phantom. Here, Christine discovers her option for a husband should she choose to devote her life to her career; when they are in his house on the underground lake, he reveals his true nature to her: submissive, and focused on furthering her career instead of his own. Similar to the scene in the novel, he kisses the hem of her skirt and confesses his lies and his love for her. Christine is terrified of this option: she bolts from her chair to escape, but then discovers his coffin, and outright accuses him of being the phantom. When she mentions his identity outside of their relationship—an identity which is stronger and more violent than his identity with her—he throws up a hand in defense, and collectedly says, “If I am the Phantom, it is because man’s hatred has made me so.... If I shall be saved, it will be because your love redeems me” (Julian). Typical of gothic heroines, Christine then faints. However instead of taking advantage of her, Erik rushes to her in concern and cares for her.

After she wakes, although she grasps her heart in delight at the music he plays, the need to know what life would be like if she chose Erik and her career overcomes her; as he plays at the organ, she rips his mask from his face. In the novel, Erik's deformity is very explicitly that he has a death's head, which suggests Christine's figurative death if she chooses him, specifically through the inability to continue a family line if she chooses a career over marriage. While Lon Chaney's deformity is reminiscent of a death's head, there is more of a focus on ugliness and intolerability. In both the novel and Julian's film, she retreats and collapses in terror at the sight, and he punishes her, grasping her face and forcing her to look at him, saying, "Feast your eyes, glut your soul on my accursed ugliness!" Christine cannot handle the kind of husband she would be stuck with if she chose to devote her life to her work—an inhuman man that would devote his life to supporting and pleasing her. Once his anger fades into misery, he withdraws from her, weak again, and sighs, "Oh, mad Christine, who would not heed my warning" (Julian). Christine begs him to let her go, and to prove his love to her, Erik tells her he will let her go, but she must never see Raoul again, or he will kill them both. Since Christine has seen him for what he really is and rejected him, his separate identities have merged: he both supports and loves her, and promises violence. However, to illustrate his equality with Christine, he grasps his heart as she did at the beginning of the scene, although here despair.

Immediately after she promises to never see Raoul again, Christine secretly invites Raoul to meet her at the masquerade. As she has seen the terrible fate in store for her should she choose to continue pursuing her career, Christine draws Raoul back into her life to give herself a normal future. She takes Raoul to the roof and admits everything, saying, "He is a monster—a loathsome beast! You must save me from him, Raoul!" (Julian). Although it appears she is giving up her power, she then details her escape plan to Raoul in the next placard: she will sing in Faust again

tomorrow night, and after the performance, Raoul must take her away to England. The plan to escape itself, along with her ordering Raoul, shows an agency and strength that Christine lacks in later adaptations, and is very close to her agency in the novel.

Here Julian's Erik begins to diverge from Leroux's. When the plan to evade the phantom inevitably fails, Erik kidnaps Christine from the stage, takes her back down to his apartment, and tosses her onto the couch on which he previously kissed the hem of her skirt. "Ungrateful fool!" he says, "You have spurned the spirit that inspired you —the spirit that made you great! ...Now, you shall see the evil spirit that makes my evil face!" (Julian). Unlike in the novel, where he still reveals some vulnerability to Christine in the climax, Erik has entirely shifted to his violent, dominating, masculine identity. The ending is quite similar to the original novel, in that Erik forces Christine to decide between marrying him and saving Raoul, or letting Raoul drown. However, in the novel, after Christine chooses to marry Erik, he lets Christine go, because she is good enough to let him kiss her on the forehead, and kiss him on the forehead in return; soon after, he dies of love for her (Leroux 334–336). Although Julian's film was originally meant to end the same way, it was rewritten to be more exciting (Hull). Instead, after Erik saves Raoul from drowning, Christine holds Raoul in her arms while a mob storms through the cellars to hunt down Erik. Consistent with his change to a more dominating villain, Erik then grabs Christine and flees with her in Raoul's carriage. At a twist in the road, the carriage overturns as the mob catches up with them. In a choice between picking up the now unconscious Christine and fleeing for his life, Erik chooses to flee.

Although there are changes from the original story, the message in this adaptation is very close to Leroux's novel: in addition to his deformity, Erik is made hideous and inhuman in his desire to serve Christine, and Christine must choose between a career and wifehood. Terrified by

Erik, she chooses to be with the hapless hero who does not respect her desires in order to have a normal, socially-acceptable life.

Lubin's 1943 Phantom of the Opera

Arthur Lubin's adaptation is particularly feminist because in the end Christine chooses no man, deciding to focus on her career instead. Similar to many horror films during World War II —The Wolf Man, 1941; Cat People, 1942; I Walked with a Zombie, 1943— this Phantom features working women as strong, competent, and desirable. However, this is the last adaptation to encourage Christine choosing her career over becoming a well-kept vicomtesse.

In a conversation reminiscent of the early scene between Christine and Raoul in Julian's adaptation, Police Inspector Raoul D'Aubert pushes his way backstage to talk to Christine. They have an argument, in which Raoul says, "You've had your fling at this for two years"; she responds, "But I don't want to give up the opera, not until I've had a chance to really sing," (Lubin). Then Christine reveals that her other love interest, Anatole Garron, has been helping her with her singing. Originally, helping Christine with her career was something only the phantom did, but in this adaptation, helping her with her career is something a normal man can do without interrupting her path to wife- and motherhood. There's another moment later, when the phantom speaks to Christine through her dressing room wall and says, "Christine, you're going to be a great and famous singer. I'll help you." Christine nervously looks around for the source, and then minutes later, Anatole says the exact same thing to her. Although he denies he was the voice she heard, supporting her career is normalized (Lubin). Christine remains undecided between Raoul and Anatole throughout the film, but she is consistently confident and proud of her work.

The phantom in this adaptation starts out as a normal man. Eriquer Claudin is a violinist in the orchestra, and is fired from the opera because he loses his ability to play. Eriquer is weak, and is impoverished because he spent all of his money anonymously paying for Christine's singing lessons. He tries to get one of his concertos published, but then because of a misunderstanding, he attacks the publisher he believes is trying to steal his work, which ends with the publisher's assistant throwing acid at Eriquer in self-defense (Lubin). This is the explanation for the iconic mask, although the phantom's deformity is not nearly as important in this adaptation, as Eriquer is meant to start out normal. Eriquer helping Christine first as a regular man also normalizes the fact that he helps her with her career. What makes him less normal is that he spends all of his money on Christine and rarely speaks to her. He is passive in their relationship, and is punished for it with his downward spiral into violence and insanity.

In Leroux's novel and Julian's film, the opera ghost is insane from the start, and has been robbing and intimidating the opera for some time, living in an apartment he built on the other side of the underground lake. He was hideously deformed at birth, which is why he wears a mask and why he lives isolated from society. Immediately, Erik is bizarre, mysterious, and frightening. Keeping Christine from a normal life of wife- and motherhood is automatically shown as unusual and a cause for her unhappiness, although Christine admits there are moments of ecstasy. However in Lubin's film, this is complicated by the notion that women can both work and be a good wife. Eriquer's donation of singing lessons is viewed as perfectly acceptable, and his later descent into madness is simply caused by pre-existing weakness and passivity. When he murders Biancarolli (the Carlotta of this adaptation), the leading soprano who forced Christine back into the chorus after her debut, he does so by hiding behind the closet curtain in her dressing room, and only addresses Biancarolli after her maid discovers him. After he threatens her, Biancarolli—a strong,

independent, working woman— orders him to take off his mask. When he does not, she charges at him, and only then does he attack her (Lubin). Not only is Eriquer more passive than Erik, but he murders a strong female character, something no previous phantom had done. His villainy lies more in murdering Biancarolli, and risking the lives of Christine and another strong woman, the soprano Loretta, who is on stage when he cuts down the chandelier. While previous phantoms are portrayed as complex gothic villain/heroes for seducing Christine with empowerment, Eriquer Claudin is entirely a villain after he snaps in the publishing house, because he terrorizes these empowered women for selfish reasons: his obsession with Christine.

This change in adaptation was a clear marker of the time; since WWII bred teamwork and patriotism, selfishness was the ultimate evil, and feminism was vital to the war effort. In the telling final scene, long after Raoul and Anatole save Christine from the phantom, Christine's maid compliments her performance. Christine responds, "Thank you Celeste. I was good, wasn't I?" which is nearly the exact dialogue Biancarolli and her maid share before they are murdered (Lubin). Then Anatole and Raoul enter with identical bouquets, each inviting her to dinner. Christine brings up the idea of them all having supper together, revealing how ambivalent she really is between them. Anatole and Raoul demand that she finally choose one of them, but instead of answering their ultimatum, she hears the adoring crowd outside her dressing room and leaves to bask in the glory of her personal achievements (Lubin). While feminism was prominent during each of these early adaptations, this Phantom is the first and last to outright advocate Christine choosing her career over any man at all.

Phantom Adaptations from 1950–1986

Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical did not come without precedent. *The Phantom of the Opera* adaptations have been produced regularly over the past century. Hammer Horror Studios produced an adaptation in 1962, during second wave feminism. While Christine in the end chooses both the Raoul character and her career, the phantom is not seeking her romantic attention, so she is not faced with the original conflict. This might seem like a step forward, but the story is also adapted from the 1943 film rather than the novel, so it strays a great deal from the original story, much like the 1983 television movie adaptation starring Jane Seymour. Inspired by Ken Hill's musical, originally produced in 1976 and revived in 1984, Andrew Lloyd Webber assembled a team to create his own adaptation. Meanwhile, Arthur Kopit and Maury Yeston were writing their musical. However, Webber's was produced first, so theirs was not produced until after Kopit adapted the script into an NBC miniseries in 1990. This led to Kopit and Yeston's adaptation, simply titled *Phantom*, being known as "the other phantom," although there are at least four musical adaptations in existence. While there have been other adaptations between Webber's musical and now, since 1986 the most popular Christine not only has less agency than in previous adaptations, but she still does not choose a career.

Andrew Lloyd Webber's Musical

While Webber's musical retains more of the novel's details than even Julian's adaptation—like Christine and Raoul being childhood friends who find each other again at the opera—Christine is unfathomably weak compared to previous adaptations. She has less ambition, she lets herself be abused, and she is often completely nonverbal. Both in Joel Schumacher's 2004 film and on stage, she is frequently physically lower than Raoul and the Phantom; when Raoul first sees Christine on

stage, he is above her in the manager's box because he has just become a sponsor, and in the first scene in which they interact, Raoul invades Christine's dressing room, and then moves about the room while she remains sitting at the vanity. During the title song, the Phantom first drags her behind him by the wrist and tosses her down the path ahead of him, and then in the famous boat scene, he stands, in control, while she lays at his feet.

Even Mme. Girya, the ballet mistress in the Webber version, is weaker despite her much larger role: despite being incredibly suspicious —she knows all the Phantom's demands, and seems to be on his side in promoting Christine— no one finds her worth suspecting of the Phantom's crimes until the second act (or never in the film), and even when several characters do voice their suspicions in the song "Notes/Twisted Every Way," they only accuse her of being his accomplice. Furthermore, after Christine does well in her debut, Mme. Girya adds to her compliment of Christine, "He will be pleased," because she feels the Phantom's opinion matters more than either of theirs (Webber et al). Although Meg can be performed to have some spunkiness, Carlotta is the only other female character that could be considered strong, and she is depicted as evil, and often punished throughout the musical; she has a backdrop dropped on her, loses her leading roles, is publically humiliated (the croaking incident), and finally loses her husband Piangi, who is the closest character to Leroux's Erik in that he supports his wife's career over his (Webber et al).

While Christine's personality has sometimes been vague in previous adaptations, she had drive and self-confidence in Leroux's, Julian's, and Lubin's, and the opera ghost always fueled these traits. However, during the song "Angel of Music," Christine makes it clear that her success is due to the Angelic genius, rather than her talent. This distinction is made in Leroux's novel, due to the fact that Erik is interested in her purity rather than her voice; in the novel, Meg Girya claims

“six months ago, she used to sing like a crock!” (Leroux 21). This would be consistent with the Webber adaptation, if the Phantom didn’t tell Christine, “Since the moment I first heard you sing, I have needed you with me, to serve me, to sing for my music” (Webber et al). Evidently, the Phantom heard some talent in her voice, but Christine is either too gentle or shy to believe she has talent, which no previous Christine has ever expressed, or the Phantom has convinced her that she is nothing without him, which is consistent with the abuse she suffers throughout.

Returning to the scene in which Raoul first enters Christine’s dressing room, unlike previous first scenes with Raoul, there is no discussion of whether or not the opera is more important to her than him. He just decides that they are going to supper together, and despite her rejecting him, saying “the Angel of Music is very strict,” he tells her he is going to get his hat, and he’ll be right back (Webber et al). There is no conversation, no acknowledgment of her desires, exactly like her subsequent scene with the Phantom. When the Phantom voices his annoyance at Raoul from behind the mirror, Christine meekly answers, “Angel I hear you speak, I listen. Stay by my side, guide me. Angel my soul was weak, forgive me. Enter at last, master” (Webber et al). She submits to him entirely, which never occurs in previous adaptations, especially not the novel, in which he at least offers her Paris at her feet as a reward for ignoring worldly things (i.e. Raoul). Subsequently, Christine has absolutely nothing to say during “Music of the Night,” when other Christines have had arguments with Erik: Leroux’s and Julian’s Christines yell at Erik, while Lubin’s Christine tries to convince him to go back to the opera.

Webber’s Christine faints after seeing a mannequin in a wedding dress (in the film the mannequin is identical to her), and when she wakes, without even saying a word to the Phantom, she decides to take off his mask. He calls her “Delilah,” “demon,” and “viper,” and then tells her she will get over his deformity (Webber et al). At the end of this scene, when she gives him back

his mask, he puts it on and tells her they are returning to the opera —and the entire time she has been in his home, she has not spoken to him. She has agency enough to take off his mask, but not enough to talk to him, and so she does not have the opportunity to express her desires, which are key to the original conflict.

Her inability to voice her feelings and desires becomes clearer in the first “Notes” scene, in which Christine is entirely absent while everyone else —literally the rest of the main cast: the managers, the Phantom (in voice/letter form), Raoul, Carlotta, Piangi, Mme. Giry and Meg— makes decisions about her life. Webber’s Christine finally expresses herself in the scene on the roof. She explains her fears about the Phantom to Raoul, and then her admiration for what the Phantom has shown her. Then, in one of the most marked differences between this adaptation and previous ones, Christine asks Raoul to “guard,” “guide,” “hold,” “hide,” and “shelter” her in the duet “All I Ask of You” (Webber et al). There is absolutely no question that she would give up the career in which she is finally succeeding to become the obedient housewife of a man who has not shown any respect for her intellect or desires. When the Phantom emerges on the roof after they have gone, he sings of the betrayal that Christine fails to acknowledge, and he very clearly declares that he intends to dominate (although still not sexually) both her and Raoul: “You will curse the day you did not do all that the Phantom asked of you!” (Webber et al). In this scene, Christine finally expresses her desires, and it is clear that she would happily choose Raoul and no career over the Phantom and personal achievements: the original inner conflict and empowerment for Christine are entirely absent.

In the second “Notes” song, about producing the Phantom’s opera, Christine actually appears, but doesn’t say anything until she yells at Carlotta, who accuses Christine of being behind the Phantom’s demands (which is sadly not included in Schumacher’s film). Christine tells the

managers she cannot be in the opera, but has to be reminded by Raoul that “they can’t make [her]” (Webber et al). However, he evidently can, and does by the end of the scene. In one of the Phantom’s letters, the Phantom attempts to manipulate Christine by saying her voice is not yet good enough, and she has to return to him. He is once again abusive, totally unlike the original phantom who was purely supportive to Christine, although destructive to the others in the opera. After hearing this letter, Raoul decides they should entrap the Phantom, using his fiancée as bait, bearing in mind that the only stake notoriously selfish Raoul has in the opera other than Christine is his financial investment. Like the last time Christine finally voiced her feelings, she cries out for Raoul to protect her, “Raoul I’m frightened, don’t make me do this. Raoul it scares me, don’t put me through this ordeal” (Webber et al). This weakness is entirely unlike any former Christine, who demanded Erik return her to the opera if he loved her, who in 1925 told Raoul how to enact her escape plan, and who in 1943 chose no man at all. At the end of this song, Christine at least runs out of the manager’s office, refusing to be a part of Raoul’s plan (although in the film, she hugs him and apparently agrees to it). However, the very next scene (on stage) is rehearsal for the Phantom’s opera, including Christine, so her refusal had absolutely no influence on the outcome (Webber et al).

In the climax of the stageplay, during “The Point of No Return,” Christine finally realizes she is not singing with Piangi when the Phantom gropes her, and unable to escape, she throws back his hood to expose him. When he cannot escape, he begs her to want him, forcing a ring onto her finger, which threatens her enough for her to tear off his mask and wig. Meanwhile in Schumacher’s film, she knowingly consents to singing the seductive song with the Phantom, and then abruptly pulls off his mask at the end. The Phantom abducts her, and as he drags Christine back through the cellars, she yet again says nothing, even when he asks her, “Why? Why?”

(Webber et al). This un-masking is portrayed more as an emasculation than a betrayal, because he attempts to be so masculine and dominant throughout this adaptation.

When Raoul arrives and the Phantom strings him up, the Phantom tosses Christine to the ground and demands that she choose between them, neither man representing any kind of empowerment. However, even though she is once again physically below them, she at least shows agency by standing and saying, “The tears I might have shed for your dark fate grow cold and turn to tears of hate! Farewell my fallen idol and false friend. We had such hopes and now those hopes are shattered” (Webber et al). Although she shows some strength, at the end of the song she collapses to the floor after him, her anger turning to tears. After the Phantom tells her again to make her choice, her anger is completely gone, and she kisses him out of pity. Not only is the personal growth she seemingly just went through completely irrelevant, she gives him the choice instead of making it herself. The Phantom decides whom she chooses. Not only is it devoid of the original feminism, but the story is not even her journey anymore. The previous conflict for Christine between a career and marriage becomes the Phantom learning to be kind to people. When the Phantom releases Raoul, he says, “take her,” instead of allowing her free-will (Webber et al). Additionally, Raoul’s last line in the trio is, “I fought so hard to free you” (Webber et al). Since he actually in no way fought to free her despite having the means and opportunity to help her leave the opera, neither suitor is a progressive or even reasonable choice for Christine.

Considering the characterization in Webber’s musical, Christine is a weak, selective mute that two abusers fight over. Even her few moments of strength —yelling at Carlotta and confronting the Phantom— are undercut by her subsequent weakness or are simply not included in the film. The feminist message of the novel and the earlier adaptations is entirely lost. Feminism could even be seen as being punished, since Carlotta is the only powerful woman. However, there

are still some similarities in the Phantom's character. Despite his unapologetic attitude toward the abuse he inflicts, Webber's Phantom still makes a wedding dress for Christine, and he dresses her in it, even though he has plenty of chances to rape her. Despite his dominant posturing, he still just wants to be loved. Yet, because he would not be content in just supporting Christine and her career like Leroux's and Julian's Erik, what makes Webber's Phantom hideous and evil is simple deformity and common crime.

1989–1990 Adaptations

Dwight Little's (1989) and Tony Richardson's (1990 television miniseries adaptation of Kopit's play) Phantoms both mark a shift back towards feminism. Both Eriks not only have names and fully developed backstories, but there are scenes of them teaching Christine. Both adaptations also interpret Raoul so differently that the comparable characters neither resemble Raoul nor share his name. In Little's film, Raoul is replaced with Richard, the manager, making him more relevant to the world of opera. Raoul's older brother Philippe from Leroux's novel replaces Raoul in Richardson's adaptation, and instead of being a passive gentleman like Leroux's Raoul, Philippe is a womanizer, promising to change his ways for Christine. The deepening of Erik's rival serves to further vilify Erik in Little's adaptation and make Erik more sympathetic in Richardson's, but most importantly the change from Raoul allows both characters to support Christine in her pursuit of a career. Richard works alongside her without qualms, and Philippe discovers Christine's talent and initially sends her to the opera for singing lessons. These more evolved suitors, who are not threatened by a woman with a career, are necessary for these evolved Christines who are not afraid to take risks, even if it means their death, and never once consider giving up their dream job for love.

Little's film frames the original story in the 1880s with the same story occurring in modern day, with Christine and Erik reincarnate. This adaptation also emphasizes Leroux's Faust references, explaining that Erik unwittingly sold his soul to be loved for his music, but the devil scarred Erik's face so that he would never be loved for anything else (Little). While haunting the opera house in the past, Erik falls in love with Christine and begins to teach her as the Angel of Music; he wants Christine to marry him, even though it means damning her as well. In the past story, Christine does not explicitly choose Richard, but she does essentially throw away her career twice to avoid paying the price of the phantom's assistance: selling her soul and being married to him for eternity. She actively chooses neither marriage nor a career aided by him; in the past, she decides to trap and kill them both in a fire so that he cannot escape, and in the present, when she discovers who he is, she tears off his flesh mask to reveal his true identity and tries to destroy his work (Little).

In Richardson's miniseries, Erik does not approach Christine as the Angel of Music, but pretends to be a composer who does not usually take students, and so he wears a mask to remain anonymous. Their lessons are not filled with mystical ecstasy, but the actual development of her skills. While he guides her in her career, i.e. convincing her to demonstrate her voice when the company is casually gathered at "the bistro," he does not try to control her, until Christine's career and dignity are in peril; before Christine's debut, Carlotta tricks her into drinking a mix of herbs that causes Christine to lose her voice during the performance. Only when the audience boos and Christine is weeping does Erik cut down the chandelier and whisk her from the stage. He takes her to his home in the cellar in an effort to protect her from the cruelty she suffered, just as his parents kept him there to protect him (Richardson).

She learns the extent of Erik's suffering from Gerard Carriere, the former manager and secretly Erik's father. Filled with sympathy and affection, she convinces Erik that she has seen his soul, and can certainly stand to see his face (Richardson). While she is much gentler than Leroux's Christine simply in asking to see his face, Erik still bends to her will and takes off his mask. She faints upon seeing it, and this causes him an emotional breakdown which is later worsened by her escaping the cellars. Abandoned, Erik begins to die of his love for Christine. Although there are many liberties taken from the original story, this adaptation captures Erik's voluntary submission—the desire to be Christine's wife—better than any. The tender moment at the end of the novel where Christine kisses Erik's forehead without fear is also included. While both Richardson's and Little's adaptations are more consistent with the message of the novel and Lubin's and Julian's films, the least progressive adaptation by Webber still remains the most well-known.

Conclusion

Erik's complexity has lessened and morphed over the past century so much so that his willingness to be Christine's wife was nearly entirely lost after 1943. The strong original conflict of career vs. wifehood has dissipated in recent adaptations, which seems to be a step forward in Richardson's and Little's films, where both Erik and the Raoul character support Christine's career. However these films are not a fixture of popular culture. Even Leroux's novel is only marginally popular. Webber's musical is the adaptation nearly everyone knows, and in it Erik is focused on dominating instead of assisting, and Christine's voice is mostly absent, like her characteristic drive and self-confidence, which makes it unclear whether or not she ever really wanted a career. Consequently, the feminist question that first made this story meaningful is vanishing from the cannon of popular culture.

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