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The Mega-, Melo-, and Meta-Drama in Adaptations of *The Phantom of the Opera*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelors of Arts in **Literary and Cultural Studies** from The College of William and Mary

by

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**Introduction**

In his essay, “Adaptation, or Cinema as Digest,” film theorists André Bazin posits that too often an adaptation is evaluated according to its fidelity (or infidelity) to its source text. He criticizes the popular notion that a film adaptation bastardizes a text by hijacking the events and characters from their literary form and thereby destroying the work by divorcing form from content. Bazin refutes this critical assumption by claiming that the plot and characters of popular literary works are already removed from their literary form in the public, popular consciousness of the culture. Characters like Don Quixote, for example, exist in the consciousness of thousands who have never read Cervantes because he is such a mythic figure of Western culture. Bazin offers the counter model that there is no one definitive form of a given text (to which adaptations must be true) but rather that a text is an amorphous amalgamation, an ongoing tension, which each adaptation contributes to, with no one version more authoritative than the next. He imagines a future where a critic “would not find a novel out of which a play and a film had been ‘made,’ but rather a single work reflected through three art forms, an artistic pyramid with three sides, all equal in the eyes of the critic. The ‘work’ would then be only an ideal point at the top of this figure, which itself is an ideal construct” (Bazin 26).

*The Phantom of the Opera* has been adapted numerous times across a fascinating diversity of media since its original novel form, first published in English translation in 1911. This text is so mythically omnipresent in American popular culture that it is impossible to privilege any one artistic form as the definitive text, particularly because
the original literary form is far overshadowed in popularity by its progeny. In this thesis, I will attempt to perform an adaptation study of the nebulous, cross-media text *The Phantom of the Opera*, examining how it shapeshifts in its major artistic incarnations and cultural moments in twentieth century America. The broad concern that motivates and directs my study is how each adaptation of the text is altered by its medium and its cultural context. How is the text changed with each adaptation and what remains relatively unchanged across the various adaptations? What pervades across the amorphous corpus of the text *The Phantom of the Opera* and why? How does *The Phantom of the Opera* derive such cultural staying power throughout the twentieth century?

Unfortunately, it will be impossible for me to do a comprehensive study of all the adaptations of *The Phantom of the Opera*. I have decided to privilege the best known, canonical adaptations within the English-speaking world because each significantly contributes to the American popular consciousness of *The Phantom of the Opera* and in diverse artistic forms. I will begin with the English translation of the original text *Le Fantôme de l’Opéra* (1909, translated in 1911). Part Gothic tale, part detective story, this novel was written by Gaston Leroux, renowned as the French equivalent to America’s Edgar Allen Poe (many critics have noted the influence of Poe in Leroux’s writing). The second work I plan to examine in depth is the 1925 silent film *The Phantom of the Opera*, produced by Universal Studios and starring the silent screen legend Lon Chaney. This film, released two years before Leroux’s death, revitalized the quickly forgotten original novel and is credited with solidifying the text’s position in Western popular culture. The third major text of my study will be the wildly popular 1986 Broadway musical
adaptation by Andrew Lloyd Webber. This musical is now the longest-running show on Broadway and one of the top-grossing franchises in the history of American entertainment. In some ways its continuing popularity is surprising because, although this musical shares its place with similar epic-style mega-musicals of the late twentieth century (*Les Miserables*, for example), Gothic, “monster”-centric musicals consistently fair badly on modern Broadway (considering flops with similar adaptation trajectory like *Frankenstein*, 1981, and *Dracula, the Musical*, 2004). I will attempt to explain how each adaptation rejuvenates the text’s popularity, and how it re-animates the themes and tensions through a different medium.

Scholar Jerrold E. Hogle, in his impressive study *The Undergrounds of The Phantom of the Opera: Sublimation and the Gothic in Leroux’s Novel and Its Progeny*, examines several adaptations within their given historical and cultural moments, and provides excellent contextual background behind the production of each adaptation. I would like to supplement his study with a more theoretical, structural examination of the adaptations of this text. Of course each adaptation will be shaped by its historic context, but what I find fascinating are the changes that take place purely because of the change in medium. Each adaptation is written in related but fundamentally different narrative languages: the language of a novel, the language of film, and the language of musical theater. Even moments that appear in each adaptation with little to no narrative change can do profoundly different cultural work solely by virtue of the different storytelling medium.

*The Phantom of the Opera* can be used for an interesting case study in the changing attitudes and aesthetic sensibilities of the twentieth century. It is an exclusively
 twentieth-century text, first written in 1909 and with its adaptations spanning into the
twenty-first century. Yet, the text never directly addresses this modern era, instead
turning almost nostalgically to the artistic conventions of a nineteenth-century past.
While its content suggests that it is an escapist text (and in many ways it is), the text at its
core grapples with the very tensions that define twentieth-century art forms; this, I will
argue, is why the text continues to be retold again and again. The text is ripe for
adaptation because it is at its heart a meta-textual investigation of adaptation. It re-
animates familiar, traditional archetypes in a way that addresses the problems of
representation, including the politics of spectacle and voyeurism, and the conflation of
reality and fiction.

In this analysis I will attempt to track these thematic trends and identify how they
reflect shifting cultural attitudes. The balance between reality and fiction is the most
important relationship in the text, and this tension is embodied in Erik and his persona
“the phantom of the opera.” The way each adaptation manages this relationship,
ultimately emphasizing more the “man” or the “mystery,” reflects whether it holds reality
or fiction as superior. Running parallel to this dynamic is a shifting emphasis from
imagination to representation. The text is fundamentally concerned with exploring
forbidden depths, literally in the Opera House and figuratively as a kind of Freudian
journey into buried psychological realms. The original novel codes these depths as
fantastic sensations, with sights and sounds beyond imagination. While each adaptation
ventures into this unknown space, the novel, by virtue of its medium, leaves the reader to
create this dimension in his or her mind. The forbidden sights and sounds of the text are
realized only in the reader’s imagination. The film then must realize the forbidden sights
of the text into graphic representation, and finally, the musical must represent the forbidden sights and sounds in real time and space. How these adaptations manage these relationships between reality and fiction, secrets and spectacles, and abstraction and representation, reveal something about the changing cultural attitudes towards these relationships. In these relationships one can track a shifting attitude from modernity to postmodernity. In this way, it becomes a worthwhile case study of the shifts in twentieth-century art, with each adaptation redefining its attitude towards the masks and phantoms of modern representation.

The Novel

Gaston Leroux’s novel *The Phantom of the Opera* was published in 1909 and its serialization in French, English, and American newspapers was received with moderate interest. In the novel, Leroux borrows conventions from several different literary genres of the nineteenth century. On one hand, the novel could be considered a late addition to the immense body of Gothic literature produced in the nineteenth century. The settings especially borrow from Gothic literature, including a churchyard full of smiling skulls and the dark underground labyrinths and dungeons of the Opera that are occupied by otherworldly individuals and wandering ratcatchers. The melodramatic love triangle between the threatening sexual “other” of Erik, the virginal victim Christine, and the rescuing hero Raoul all follow stock characterizations from a Gothic tradition. Leroux is clearly borrowing from Gothic characters like *Dracula* (1897) for the character of Erik, especially with his supernatural seduction. The most obvious contemporary Gothic story
from which Leroux borrows major plots elements is the English novel *Trilby* (1894), which also features a hypnotizing musician who turns a young girl into a national singing sensation under his thrall.

In this Gothic mode, the novel explores the psychological and often sexual undercurrents of society. Many critics have noted that Leroux’s Paris Opera House serves as a caricature of Parisian society, where public facades mask a sinister underground of social transgression. While this is a dignified space where socialites share the high cultural art form of opera, there are hysterical unmarried ballet girls entertaining gentlemen in the dressing rooms, prima donnas wielding more power than the managers of the opera, and of course, the omnipresent threat of death from the infamous Opera Ghost. Leroux’s Opera House becomes a character itself, with a rather disturbed Freudian psyche. Beneath the stages and lobbies of the public level of the Opera House lurks immense caverns, labyrinths, primordial lakes, and worse of all, a disfigured, murdering monster. The character of Christine becomes an extension of the reader, together descending from the daylight of the public world to a dangerous but captivating underworld of Gothic drama and horror. The desire to explore these forbidden depths fuels Christine’s curiosity, the narrator’s fervor to investigate the supposedly supernatural events, and the reader’s motivation to turn the pages of the novel. This Gothic dimension of the novel imbues it with its melodrama, its romance, and its penchant for the fantastic and the supernatural.

At the same time, the novel is also structured like a detective novel. Leroux was an admitted fan of the detective fictions of Edgar Allen Poe and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (Haining 14) and famously wrote a puzzle escape short story *The Mystery of the Yellow*
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Leroux’s flare for detective fiction, coupled with his professional experience as a newspaper journalist, imbues the text of The Phantom of the Opera with an interesting narrative voice. The story of The Phantom of the Opera is told by a fairly authoritative narrator who fashions himself an investigative historian. The narrator addresses the reader directly throughout the novel (but particularly in the introduction and epilogue) and insists upon the historical reality of an otherwise melodramatic and far-fetched Gothic story. The novel begins with language that balances the Gothic invocation of phantoms with the insistence of investigative reality:

INTRODUCTION
IN WHICH THE AUTHOR OF THIS SINGULAR WORK INFORMS THE READER HOW HE ACQUIRED THE CERTAINTY THAT THE OPERA GHOST REALLY EXISTED

The Opera Ghost really existed. He was not, as was long believed, a creature of the imagination of the artists, the superstition of the managers, or the absurd and impressionable brains of the young ladies of the ballet, their mothers, the box-keepers, the cloak-room attendants, or the concierge. No, he existed in flesh and blood, though he assumed all the outward characteristics of a real phantom, that is to say, of a shade (Leroux 26).

He then goes on to describe the documents and interviews from which he has crafted this “real” account of the apparent haunting. This passage also exhibits the narrator’s superior, even disdainful attitude towards the naïve and superstitious occupants of the Paris Opera House. Yet, of course, the narrator is also indicted in continuing this gossip in his retelling of the story. Ostensibly, the novel aims to expose rationally and systematically the Gothic events of the Opera House as fraudulent deceptions. Nevertheless, it evokes the same supernatural thrills as Gothic fiction by withholding these moments of revelation until very late in the narrative. The novel is littered with
bizarre passages in which the journalistic narrator sounds like the very lady gossipers he
dismisses in the introduction:

Did the opera ghost really take a seat at the managers’ supper-table, that night, uninvited? And can we be sure that the figure was that of the Opera ghost himself? Who would venture to assess as much? I mention the incident, not because I wish for a second to make the reader believe—or even try to make him believe—that the ghost was capable of such a sublime piece of impudence, but because, after all, the thing is possible (51).

In a narrative that often explicitly defends its own historical accuracy, these moments of ambiguity with deliberately unanswered questions piques the narrative intrigue and, more important, reasserts the sublime horrors and mystery of its Gothic dimension.

This linguistic play—between tantalizing glimpses of the supernatural and the promise of uncovering these mysteries—is a tension that motivates the entire novel. Leroux plays a game with his readers, whetting their curiosity with inexplicable events and sensationally Gothic scenes, and withholding the scientific explanations until the revelation is most satisfying in a typical detective novel fashion. The narrative without fail follows the point of view of the characters that will most obscure what the reader wants to know. The most interesting and intriguing narrative—the abduction of Christine and her relationship with the Opera’s resident ghost/genius/madman—is left untold for the first half of the novel. Rather, the narrative follows the desperate and piece-meal investigations of the new opera managers and Raoul as they try to uncover the identity of the ghost and the whereabouts of Christine. Only in the chapter “Apollo’s Lyre,” some 120 pages into the novel, is Christine finally allowed to narrate the events that have unfolded between her and Erik in the undergrounds of the theater. In the whole novel, Erik himself speaks at length in only two conversations—once in the memory of his
friend “the Persian,” and in a final near-death conversation at the end of the novel (again only through “the Persian’s” testimony). The voices of Christine and Erik are always presented though the lens of other characters (Raoul and the Persian, respectively), and then doubly removed since these accounts are filtered by the investigating narrator. The two characters who drive the narrative are also the two who are the most deliberately obscured by it. The climax of the narrative—when Christine is given an ultimatum between marriage to Erik or the explosion of the Opera House—is narrated by “the Persian,” who is a knowledgeable and credible narrator, but at the same time incredibly limited as a narrator since he can only piece together the climatic exchange between Erik and Christine as he hears it through a wall, because he is trapped and half-insane in Erik’s underground torture chamber. While the narrative masquerades as a historical report, it is fairly apparent that the novel is first and foremost a suspenseful thriller.

The narrator often interrupts the narrative with personal judgments or with footnotes providing extra “historical details” (51) (230). Late in the narrative, when “the Persian” and Raoul encounter a strange figure in the cellars, a bizarre footnote suggests that the narrator is deliberately withholding information from the reader:

Like the Persian, I can give no further explanation touching the apparition of this shade. Whereas, in this historical narrative, everything else will be normally explained, however abnormal the course of events may seem, I cannot give the reader expressly to understand what the Persian meant by the words, ‘It is some one worse than that!’ The reader must try to guess for himself, for I promised M Pedro Gailhard, the ex-manager of the Opera, to keep his secret regarding the extremely interesting and useful personality of the wandering, cloaked shade which, while condemning itself to live in the cellars of the Opera, rendered such immense services to those who, on gala events, for instance, ventured to stray away from the stage. I am speaking of a service of state; and upon my word of honour, I can say no more (198).
A footnote, which by all conventions is inserted to clarify or validate the narrative, is here used for the opposite purpose—to further mystify and beguile. This is an adequate metaphor of the major tension that fuels the suspense of the novel. While the text ostensibly promises to draw back the curtain on the mysterious world of supernatural events within the walls of this world unto itself, it is in fact the indescribable, the unimaginable, the unexplained phenomena that is what makes the novel engaging. The text must perform a balancing act between revelation and obscurity.

In this regard, Tzveten Todorov’s analysis of Henry James’ works becomes incredibly useful. This passage from *The Secret of Narrative* can be applied readily to Leroux’s text:

The Jamesian narrative is always based on the quest for an absolute and absent cause....It is often a character...It is absolute: for everything in this narrative ultimately owes its presence to this cause. But the cause is absent and must be sought....The tale consists of the search for, the pursuit of, this initial cause, this primal essence. The narrative stops when it is attained. On one hand there is an absence (of the cause, of the essence, of the truth), but this absence determines everything; on the other hand there is a presence (of the quest), which is only the search for an absence. Thus the secret of Jamesian narrative is precisely the existence of an essential secret, of something not named, of an absent and superpowerful force which sets the whole present machinery of the narrative in motion. This motion is a double and, in appearance, a contradictory one (which allows James to keep beginning it over and over). On one hand he deploys all his forces to attain the hidden essence, to reveal the secret object; on the other, he constantly postpones, protects the revelation—until the story’s end, if not beyond. The absence of the cause or of the truth is present in the text—indeed, it is the text’s logical origin and reason for being. The cause is what, by its absence, brings the text into being. The essential is absent, the absence is essential (145).

In the case of this text, Erik (and his persona the Phantom of the Opera) obviously serves as Todorov’s cause. In the Opera House, he is a figure that is always and never present, he is heard and seen everywhere but can never be found. Erik is often described as a shadow or an echo—sights and sounds that denote and deny physical presence. There is
a terrible absent presence in many of the descriptions of Erik. For instance, “his nose is so little worth talking about that you can’t see it side-face; and the absence of that nose is a horrible thing to look at” (33). This paradox of the horror of seeing absence reappears through the novel. When Raoul believes he has caught Christine in a rendezvous with Erik, he “peeping behind the curtain, could not believe his eyes, which showed him nothing” (112). His voice too is a forbidden mystery:

‘Raoul,’ she said, ‘forget the man’s voice and do not even remember its name….You must never try to fathom the mystery of the man’s voice.’
‘Is the mystery so very terrible?’
‘There is no more awful mystery on this earth. Swear to me that you will make no attempt to find out’ (199).

The torture chamber that Raoul and the Persian find themselves in works precisely on the principle of the terrible illusion of presence. Trapped in a multi-mirrored room, they are unable to convince themselves that their visions of forests and deserts are optical illusions.

However, the world of the unknowable and indescribable is not exclusively horrible:

Persons who are visited by the Angel [of Music] quiver with a thrill unknown to the rest of mankind. And they cannot touch an instrument or open their mouths to sing, without producing sounds that put all other human sounds to shame. Then people who do not know the Angel has visited these persons say that they have ‘genius’ (72).

This fantastic realm, occupied by ghosts, angels, and musical geniuses produces sights and sounds that are more beautiful and more horrific than can be imagined. Often these two sides of the fantastic—beauty and horror—exist together in the sublime, and certainly in the figure of Erik. Even after Christine is distraught to learn that her Angel of Music is really a man, his sublime power remains in his supernatural voice: “I was made
to remember that, though he was not an angel, nor a ghost, nor a genius, he remained the voice…for he sang. And I listened…and stayed!” (137).

These two sides of the fantastic—sublime beauty and horror—are focused in the figure of Erik. What does one make of this figure, and what cultural function does this character serve? As Hogle has argued, Erik is the archetypal “Other within.” He is the persona of sexual deviance, physical abnormality, the foreigner, and whatever other fears or unacceptable desires fester in the undergrounds of the particular cultural unconscious of that adaptation. More generally, Erik as Todorov’s cause easily stands in for death, which Todorov observes as “both absolute and natural, with pure absence” (Todorov 161). Erik brings death upon his unfortunate victims, and even serves as a kind of *memento mori* with his various death-head masks. To Raoul, Christine confides “I thought I was going to die…*Because I had seen him!”* (128). A closer look at this famous unmasking scene may better reveal how exactly the figure of Erik takes on these meanings, and particularly Todorov’s “cause.”

We at once began the duet in *Othello* with a despair, a terror which I had never displayed before…Love, jealousy, hatred burst out around us in harrowing cries. Erik’s black mask made me think of the natural mask of the Moor of Venice. He was Othello himself…Suddenly, I felt a need to see beneath the mask. I wanted to know the *face* of the voice and, with a movement which I was utterly unable to control, swiftly my fingers tore away the mask. Oh, horror, horror, horror! (140)

In this moment Erik becomes the figure of Othello to Christine as they sing a duet from the opera.¹ At this crucial moment in the text, where the “secret of the narrative” is finally exposed, Erik becomes curiously racialized as Othello, and his seduction of Christine suddenly runs parallel to the seduction of Desdemona, who is similarly enthralled by an exotically romanticized and mortally jealous other. Christine becomes

¹ Although the novel does not specify which adaptation Erik and Christine perform, Leroux is probably referring to Verdi’s immensely popular *Otello* (1887).
enthralled by this role she is playing (here Desdemona), and allows herself to become another archetypal role: the too-curious Pandora, or even the biblical Eve. It is little surprise that these intertexts appear, since the story of the novel is by no means particularly original. It is an amalgamation of many familiar Western allegories and cautionary tales of over-curious women. A vulnerable and virginal female is captured or seduced by a sexually-potent, exoticized monster and attraction and repulsion (and sexual consent and rape) are indistinguishable. The monster and the victim are at once antagonists and lovers, each sharing marginalized positions outside of patriarchal society. This theme takes many forms, in the myth of Beauty and the Beast, Trilby, Pluto and Persephone, and in many contemporary horror films. This speaks again to Todorov’s secret of narrative. He argues that

…the quest for an essential, always evanescent secret implies that the narrative is an exploration of the past rather than a progression into the future….To “limit” oneself to the past signifies to reject the originality of events, to believe one lives in a world of recall….And the narrative will always be the story of another narrative (163-4).

Though Leroux seems to be working through very modernist anxieties about spectacle and simulation, this occurs through the lens of the past, in the opulence of nineteenth century Paris, through a conflation of Western narratives.

Leroux borrows heavily from both ancient archetypes and contemporary literature and drama, and this is partly explained by another genre that influenced his novel: the “opera-house mystery.” Margaret Miner describes this genre of nineteenth-century short stories in an essay entitled “Phantoms of Genius: Women and the Fantastic in the Opera-House Mystery”:

…opera-house narratives can never simply choose between reporting concrete reality and evoking the extranatural. Everyday conditions at the Opera are
instead…perfectly designed to prevent factual accounts and fantastic stories from parting ways too quickly….The narratives paradoxically assume that the fantastic is a reliable way of entering into the real conditions of the Paris Opera (123-4).

Here, Miner makes the important observation that supernatural forces seem to be part of the reality of the Opera, and that the theater-dwellers are somehow predisposed to the fantastic. This association could stem from the fact that music has been considered an otherworldly art—either sacred or demonic—especially in the nineteenth century. The seductive power of music to draw in the unsuspecting listener is an omnipresent theme in much of the history of Western music, particularly in opera. The songs of Orpheus in his rescue of Eurydice from Hades (depicted in numerous operas), or the entrancing song of the Queen of the Night in Mozart’s *The Magic Flute*, reinforce the idea that music has a hypnotic, even demonic power to seduce and manipulate. In fact, the novel seems to present the antithesis of the Orpheus myth, by presenting a musician who uses his seduction song to lead his lover into the hells of the Opera House cellars (instead of out of hell). Also like the Orpheus myth, it is when the lovers see each another that the power is broken. A history of music censorship in the Western world exhibits this long held notion that music has an almost inexplicable influence over unwitting hearers.

Music is the mysterious art form, it can elicit a powerful emotional response from anyone, but its artistic mechanism (its rules, its conventions, its technical requirements) are little understood except by highly trained music theorists. Therefore, theater houses in turn seem natural hosts for supernatural forces, since theater is inherently a mystical art, making a business of creating visions and spectacular realities.

As a kind of backstage novel, the line between the world of theater and the world of reality is very thin. Often characters describe themselves as if they were living a
drama. This becomes particularly evident in the language used when Christine takes
Raoul on a tour of the opera-house:

‘Come for a walk, dear. The air will do you good.’
Raoul thought that she would propose a stroll in the country, far from that
building which he detested as a prison whose gaoler he could feel walking within
the walls…the gaoler Erik…but she took him to the stage and made him sit on the
wooden curb of the well, in the doubtful peace and coolness of a first scene set for
the evening’s performance. On another day, she wandered with him, hand in
hand, along the deserted paths of a garden whose creepers had been cut out by a
decorator’s skillful hands. It was as though the real sky, the real flowers, the real
earth were forbidden her for all time and she condemned to breathe no other air
than that of the theater….She took him to the wardrobe- and property-rooms, took
him all over her empire, which was artificial, but immense, covering seventeen
storeys from the ground floor to the roof and inhabited by an army of subjects
(123).

This passage highlights how the Opera House is for Christine both her empire and her
prison. This is exclusively a space of simulation, of artificial beauty, but Christine
inhabits this space as her natural landscape. Though of course it is also her prison of
sorts, because the entire building in haunted by her aggressor. The same could be said for
Erik, who reigns as the omnipresent Phantom but also is confined by its walls as a social
outcast.

Gradually, the on- and off-stage drama in the Opera House productions become
indistinguishable. For instance, Christine, in a performance of Faust,\(^2\) sings the lyrics,

“Holy angel, in Heaven blessed…My spirit longs with thee to rest!” just before she is
abducted (Leroux 153). She also happens to be abducted in the Prison Act. The
obligatory prison (or seraglio) scene in the opera seria tradition usually involves an
abducted heroine who sings about her tragic position, and very often she will contemplate
suicide to protect her innocence from her barbarian captor. Christine is then of course

\(^2\) Again, the text does not specify which operatic adaptation of Faust is being performed, though Leroux is
likely referring to Gounod’s Faust (1859).
actually abducted and finds herself in that very position. Christine certainly is described as being predisposed to the fantastic: “[Raoul] now realized the possible state of mind of a girl brought up between a superstitious fiddler and a visionary old woman and he shuddered when he thought of the consequences of it all” (102). Indeed, Christine is several times even described as a kind of witch, thrown into “sublime ecstasy” at the otherworldly sounds of the “Angel of Music” (99). Of course the major production at the Opera House during the novel is Faust, which is often a cautionary tale against seeking supernatural power and knowledge. Like Dr. Faustus or Christine, the reader is drawn too deeply in his investigations into a disturbing and inexplicable supernatural horror. The Opera House becomes for Christine a veritable prison of simulation, which becomes even more literal when Raoul and “the Persian” find themselves trapped in the house of mirrors torture chamber in the last act of the novel. For “the Persian” and Raoul in Erik’s torture chamber, understanding the machinations of the artificial deceptions does not make them any less disturbing. To borrow from Hogle’s analysis:

Techniques of “representing the truth” based on reportage run up against the “truth” as a series of simulations, ghostlike counterfeits of counterfeits, at least partly untrue at all levels. The phantasmal quality at every level in the “reality” that phantoms and phantasms indicate, we now find, may be one of the most frightening “undergrounds” in Le Fantome del l’Opera (36).

Though The Phantom of the Opera may explore other more specific anxieties about cultural “others,” the most pervading anxiety is the meta-fictional concern about seductive dangerous sights, sounds, and simulations.

While the novel exploits these tensions, it ultimately stabilizes these anxieties by systematically debunking the various tricks Erik performs, and most importantly disclosing Erik’s past and reassuring the reader that the “phantom of the opera” is in fact
only a man and therefore containable. The narrative force is the discovery of Erik, the man behind the mask as it were. Therefore, the narrative must end when this human reality is disclosed. In Tordorov’s words: “The appearance of the cause halts the narrative; once the mystery is disclosed, there is no longer anything to tell. The presence of the truth is possible, but it is incompatible with the narrative” (147). This holds true in the novel, where the majority of the factual evidence about Erik’s life (his history with circuses, gypsies, and his service in Persia) are only finally disclosed in the Epilogue, which exists outside of the narrative, and after the character’s death. In the final paragraph of the narrative (but before the Epilogue), the Persian learns of Erik’s death and posts a newspaper advertisement declaring simply “Erik is dead.” These final words of the narrative signal the end and re-stabilization of the narrative, and the character of Erik is literally killed with the language of the newspaper posting. Of course one could deconstruct this claim, making the argument that this newspaper posting could be false, especially considering that the novel itself at the very least calls into question the authenticity of reportage versus the sensational storytelling of yellow-journalism. Still, the reader has no choice but to believe that Erik is in fact dead, and the Epilogue, in which all the loose ends of the mystery of the narrative are disclosed, confirms this fact.

Despite this tension between journalistic reality and supernatural fantasy, the novel ultimately ends with the superiority of rationality and language as its purveyor. The novel becomes a meta-fictional cautionary tale about the horrors of the unknowable manifested in art, masks, theater, music, stories, and archetypes. In this opera-house space where intertexts of timeless generic troupes and contemporary texts are constantly reanimated, those that confuse reality for theater and theater for reality (as Christine so

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3 One reviewer of the novel called Leroux “the canary-journalist of literature” (A Busy Spook, III16).
often does) will inevitably be imprisoned by these artifices. This horror is finally neutralized with the narrator’s language, which can investigate and debunk these mysteries scientifically. Words stand outside of the mystic realm of forbidden sights and sounds, though potentially this fantastic dimension remains all the more powerful since it exists only in the individual consciousness of the reader who animates the text. The text is fundamentally an exploration of the beauties and horror of sights and sounds—so it no wonder that the text was soon seized for adaptation into audio-visual media. But what happens to the text when this forbidden dimension is given aural and visual reality?

The 1925 Universal Film

In 1925, Leroux’s novel *The Phantom of the Opera* was adapted for the first time into a motion picture. It was released two years before Leroux’s death, and Hogle reports that Leroux lauded the film as further evidence of the existence of the Opera Ghost, stating that the movie, “one of the most extraordinary strips of film,” allowed the figure of Erik to “swim before my eyes” (Hogle 135). This conflation of fantasy and reportage that Leroux maintains in the novel becomes all the more tenuous when the text is adapted into film, arguably one of the most problematic media in regard to truth and lies. Since its inception, film has provided both a means of documentary proof (Lumiere’s *Actualities*) and extravagant fantasy (Melies’ early trick films). This tension between the vivid reality and fantastic manipulation of this medium fuels the anxiety and pleasure of this Universal horror film. For the first time, Leroux’s fantastic events and characters are given graphic reality in dynamic time and space (if not yet in synchronized sound or
color). How is the text transformed by this new medium, and specifically what occurs when Leroux’s barely describable sights are realized not in reader’s imaginations, but in a visual representation?

In some ways, the visual dimension of film cannot maintain the mystery of limited narration that Leroux often employs. Moments of great confusion and abstraction in the novel are replaced by objective long shots and omniscient crosscuts. The film as a whole maintains frontality and a proscenium arch-like distance between the action and the camera, though there are notable scenes of exception. Many of the scenes, especially early in the film, appear as mere exhibition of stage performances, with little to no editing to bring the camera closer to the act. Much of the mystery seems reduced by virtue of the photographic representation. For example, in the novel when Raoul witnesses Christine’s disappearance through a mirror, the language manifests his confusion as Christine seems to fragment before his eyes:

Christine walked towards her image in the glass and the image came towards her. The two Christines—the real one and the reflection—ended by touching; and Raoul put out his arms to clasp the two in one embrace. But, by a sort of dazzling miracle that sent him staggering, Raoul was suddenly flung back, while an icy blast swept across his face; he saw not two, but four, eight, twenty Christines spinning round him, laughing at him and fleeing so swiftly that he could not touch one of them. At last, everything stood still again; and he saw himself in the glass. But Christine had disappeared (112-3).

While this passage may seem ripe for a dazzling visual interpretation, when this scene is realized in the film the objective camera clearly presents Christine’s mirror as a sliding door which she enters with little mystery. The sudden appearances and disappearances of different notes and objects from the managers’ office in the novel, a major source of mystery in the novel, are reduced to a few shots of a gloved hand often seen manipulating objects through a sliding panel in the wall. In this way, the objective camera cannot seem
to recreate the mystery that the novel maintains through limited perspective. The climax in the cellars of the opera house, in the novel frustratingly limited to the Persian’s experience in the torture chamber, is replaced by a series of omniscient cross-cuts that allow the audience to see not only the inside and outside of the torture chamber simultaneously, but also the approaching mob making its way down the cellars to kill Erik. While the novel’s source of suspense comes from limiting the narrative point of view until specific points of revelation, the film’s suspense is built with an omniscient camera that crosscuts between different forces and spaces to suspend the moment when these forces will meet in a technique typical of D.W. Griffith’s melodramas.

In fact, the film’s relationship with the genre of melodrama is at the heart of this tension between the realistic and the fantastic. If the mystery and the “inexpressible” elements of the novel are diminished by the literalization of the photographic medium, how are these elements relocated in the film text? While the film’s visual dimension necessitates a heightened level of realistic representation, its “unspeakable” dimension is achieved by borrowing from theatrical melodrama which manipulates the power of music, gesture, and silence. The plot of the film follows certain melodramatic conventions. The climax of the film features the familiar melodramatic scenario of an “othered” sexual aggressor threatening a virginal female, who awaits rescue by her heroic lover and the community at large that will restore the status quo by eliminating the villain. Although this melodramatic structure originates in the novel, in the film for the first time these events are enacted theatrically, and most important with a musical accompaniment which is one of the most defining aspects of melodrama (which is, after all, melody-drama).
In their work on melodrama, both Linda Williams and Peter Brooks have described melodrama as a genre of excesses and sensationalism that “puts forth a moral truth in gesture and picture that could not be fully spoken in words” (Williams, American, 19). Unspeakable truth is subverted into elaborate pantomime, gesture, and music. Williams explains that “typically the ‘unspeakable’ truth revealed in the sensational scene is the revelation of who is the true villain, and who the innocent victim” (19). If this is so, then the unmasking scene is the most melodramatic moment of the film. In this famous sequence, Erik is seated at his organ as Christine peers over his shoulder. Overcome with curiosity, after a few aborted attempts, Christine finally removes Erik’s mask. In a two-shot, Chaney’s horrific make-up is finally revealed straight to the camera for a few seconds, and then he turns around to confront Christine, who recoils. As Erik ominously approaches Christine (who has now fallen to the floor), the shots alternate between long shots, high angle shot of Christine on the floor, and point-of-view shots from Christine’s low angle position. Since most of the film maintain a proscenium-like distance, these low-angle close ups of Chaney are very distinct. They are also unusual since Chaney appears to break the cinematic fourth wall and peer straight into the camera as he creeps toward it. These shots also fall in and out of focus, as if simulating Christine’s hysterical subjectivity. This moment is easily the most remembered sequence from the film, but what is its significance?

In a melodrama, innocence is defined by suffering. While Chaney’s Phantom is the villain of the film, in this scene he very clearly suffers a highly sentimentalized shame very close to Chaney’s Quasimodo in Hunchback of Notre Dame. Paradoxically, this unmasking is the moment where the figure of Erik is most alienated from and yet
sympathetic to the viewer, who at once suffers with Erik at his most exposed and vulnerable (but monstrous), but also fears the repercussions of his or her own voyeuristic desire manifested through Christine, who must be punished for her morbid curiosity. In a brief inversion of female victim/male villain, Christine has become the aggressor of the scene. This conflation of victim/villain moves the film closer to the genre of horror, though as Linda Williams has shown, horror and melodrama are kindred “body” genres of excess (“Film Bodies,” 729). In horror films, she argues, the suffering female and horrifying male are united in their marginalized positions as models of sexual difference and objects of the voyeuristic gaze. The simultaneous sympathy and revulsion of this sequence embodies the film’s vacillation between melodrama and horror.

While the “unseeable” elements of the text are manifested through this kind of excess, the “unhearable” elements of the text are realized in a particular kind of aural “lack.” As noted in the analysis of the novel, the most powerful moments of the text are motivated by a kind of lack, or absent presence. After all, this text is profoundly about a horrifying lack, most vividly manifested in Erik’s disfigurement. This lack becomes redefined in this new media, which has acquired a mimetic visual dimension, but still lacks synchronized sound. In his essay, “‘The Phantom of the Opera’: the Lost Voice of Opera in Silent Film,” Michal Grover-Friedlander makes a fascinating argument that silent film and opera are fundamentally the same despite the obvious difference between a primarily aural medium and a “silent” medium. That is not to say that the film is “silent,” for indeed it would have been exhibited with a musical accompaniment.⁴ He argues that opera at its core is not about the expression of voice, but the failure of operatic voice to express. Thus the famous silent screams of cinema, of the grief-stricken

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⁴ In my research, I have not been able to find any definitive surviving accompaniment score.
mother in *Battleship Potemkin*, of Mitch’s mother in Hitchcock’s *The Birds*, and of Erik in *The Phantom of the Opera*, represent moments of both pure and absent voice (Zizek 50).

That which lies at the limit of meaningful vocal expression and constitutes a hidden focus to which voice is drawn can be understood in terms of that which transcends the stylized operatic voice, whether that be the cry or the silence beyond song. Surprisingly then, silent film is uniquely suited to revealing opera’s tendency to go beyond song, in its fascination with and anxiety about silence….Opera’s essence lies in moments of pure voice…where visual, textual, and musical signification all fail and voice alone exists. In this formulation, the unarticulated cry is opera’s goal with respect to voice. Opera is the endless and painful quest for the original Object (Mother, Woman, Jouissance). As such, it evokes the voice and conceals it, fetishizes it and reveals the gap that cannot be filled (Grover-Friedlander 181, 185).

This analysis reveals a deeply modernist anxiety about the failure of the artist to express him- or herself purely through artistic signification. This observation applies to both central figures of the text, Christine and Erik, who both in expressive gesture and silent song repeatedly attempt and fail to communicate. Grover-Friedlander draws from an earlier essay by Slavoj Zizek titled “Grimaces of the Real, or When the Phallus Appears.” Like many critics, Zizek connects Erik’s skull-face to the figure in Edvard Munch’s *The Scream*. In his analysis of the famous Expressionist painting, Zizek emphasizes that the figure’s scream is not silent because paintings cannot produce sound, but because “it is rather the very essence of this picture that the scream we perceive is mute since the anxiety is too taut for it to find an outlet in vocalization” (48). Like in Leroux’s novel, it is the frustratingly inexpressible, the too real and too fantastic, that creates one of the most horrifying and sublime moments of the text. The scream is instead subverted to whatever musical cue is provided by the accompaniment to the silent film. This hearkens again to the melodramatic technique, where the drama is assisted by melody to express
beyond words, which of course follows from the tradition of opera itself. As the novel sets journalistic and Gothic styles against each other, the film pits its documentary ability against expressionism and a melodrama-based narrative.

The unconventional editing as well as the psychological quality of the unmasking scene is a mark of German Expressionism. The “unspeakable” quality of the novel is translated to a horrific visual excess. The film is full of spectacles: Hollywood stars, crowds of extras, extravagant sets, and of course Chaney’s trademark make-up. These spectacles are designed to impress and entertain as much as they disturb. Although the visual style of this film is a far cry from the extreme stylization of pivotal German Expressionist films like *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, many critics connect these two films because of the ominous sets that seem to swallow its actors, the stylized acting of the hypnotized/hypnotist, the shadow as spectral presence, and the Phantom’s resemblance to *The Scream*. The film borrows the expressionist technique to heighten its suspense by creating an ominous mise-en-scene and by delaying the Phantom’s physical appearance until the fourth reel of the film (his presence is denoted with a cast shadow on a wall through the first half). The film bizarrely begins with a long sequence of a shadowy figure moving through the cellars of the opera house with a single lantern, which of course fails to illuminate anything. This moment, though almost avant-garde in its detachment from the film’s narrative, serves as a visual metaphor for the tension that fuels the text: that light (or the play of light in the cinema) will reveal some hidden truth to its viewer, when in fact it only illuminates how little that can truly be seen and understood. The expressionist sets again sublimate the inexpressible.
One of the most surreal and Expressionist spaces of the film is of course the mirror torture chamber. The artificial trees, dangling noose, swirling lights, and mirror maze both induce and graphically express the growing madness of its occupants. This house of mirrors could easily play for laughs (as Chaplin does three years later in *The Circus*). However, here the visual spectacle is as wondrous as it is disturbing. Another famous spectacle of the film is the crashing chandelier. Once again, the novelty and high production value of the spectacle is tinged with violence of its landing and the mob that ensues. The film employs an enormous cast of extras that appear in the Masquerade scene and in the two mob scenes (after the chandelier falls and in the finale). The mob is often disturbing as an unthinking and hysterical mass. One woman is very clearly trampled as the mob races away from the crashed chandelier. In the end, even Raoul and Christine are in danger of being crushed by the mob as it rushes after a fleeing Erik. This overwhelming mob suggests that while the excessive figure of Erik is neutralized (though somewhat ambiguously in his watery demise), the community that remains has its own destructive force.

While voyeurism is already a theme in the novel, in the film the viewer becomes an active participant. The film allows the viewer to gaze voyeuristically at the ballet girls on and off-stage. Also, there are several moments of triangulating gazes. For example, when Christine is alone in her dressing room, the viewer, Raoul, and the Phantom simultaneously secretly watch Christine. The other crucial moment of gazing occurs in the famous unmasking scene. The viewer is linked to Christine’s gaze in her desire for the ultimate revelation of what is behind the mask (both Erik’s disfigurement and Lon Chaney’s famed makeup). At the unmasking scene, the viewer, like Christine, is
rewarded with the horrific sight of Erik’s disfigurement. The two-shot frame allows the viewer to indulge in looking while displacing the guilt of looking onto Christine (Williams, *When a Woman Looks*, 20). The viewer can displace his or her own voyeuristic desires upon the mythical curiosity of the weak, Pandora-like female. This scene is notable in its sudden departure from a more straightforward, stagey cinematography that dominates the film style. As described earlier, following the famous two-shot of Christine unmasking the Phantom, a series of first-person, point of view shots from Christine’s perspective from the floor reveal Lon Chaney’s gruesome make-up from a low angle with low angle lighting. His eyes fixed on the camera, he slowly approaches the camera, which deliberately falls in and out of focus. This uncharacteristic departure from the traditional Hollywood style creates a striking psychological dimension, forcing the audience to share not only Christine’s vulnerable position on the floor, but also her hysterical and fainting visual perspective.

Erik’s face must be the most fearsome spectacle of all. The moment of revelation is built up with such narrative tension (with very slow pacing leading up to the revelation), and the expectations of the audience were high with Chaney having impressed America with his Quasimodo make-up in *Hunchback of Notre Dame* three years before. His horrific appearance has solidified the film’s position in the history of American cinema, and Chaney’s inventive skull-face makeup channels the novel’s theme of excessive and horrific lack of facial features. Nevertheless, the fact remains that any graphic representation of the novel’s disfigurement will be inadequate to a reader’s imagination of it. At least one critical review at the time noted some disappointment with Erik’s disfigurement: “He is by no means beautiful, but he is not as hideous as one
anticipated” (Hall, X5). Even with the Expressionist visual strategies, a film cannot
replicate the imagination of the reader of the novel, and any graphic representation with
inherently fall short.

The Expressionist visual style is perfect for depicting a present absence—
especially in the use of shadow that at once signifies and defies physical presence. In
Expressionist films, this is often used to a fantastic end, to depict supernatural beings and
their abilities (in Murnau’s Nosferatu for instance). However, in The Phantom of the
Opera, the film continues the novel’s insistence that Erik is, in fact, a man (and therefore
can ultimately be contained). Nevertheless, this film’s phantom becomes a kind of
phantom of filmic representation. Although this film is clearly an example of classic
Hollywood narrative cinema, it participates in Tom Gunning’s “cinema of attractions”
model of early cinema in interesting ways, particularly in the unmasking scene.

According to Gunning:

This vertiginous experience of the frailty of our knowledge of the world before
the power of visual illusion produced that mixture of pleasure and anxiety which
the purveyors of popular culture had labeled sensations and thrills and on which
they founded a new aesthetic of attractions (825).

This unmasking moment represents this duality between pleasure and anxiety, and
repulsion and fascination that typifies the earliest cinematic attractions. The “cinema of
attractions” films “explicitly acknowledge their spectators, seeming to reach outwards
and confront” (827). This strange moment in which Chaney fixes his gaze on the camera
and creeps slowly forward hearkens back to this particular spectacle-conscious mode of
cinema. Though this moment is contained by the film’s narrative, where Christine is
punished for the audience’s voyeurism, this sets into motion all the pleasures and
anxieties that saturated early cinema. This is not to suggest that the audience experienced
any naïve fear at this moment, but rather that they participated in a self-aware game. This willing deception and entrancement speaks to an audience “whose daily experience has lost the coherence and immediacy traditionally attributed to reality. This loss of experience creates a consumer hunger for thrills” (Gunning 829). Therefore, the horror of the unmasking moment arises not from the naïve belief in a physical reality of the filmic image, but rather a kind of self-aware face-off with modern simulation and spectacle. While the novel effectively removes the mask of artifice to reveal a horrific reality, the thrill of the film occurs when the mask is removed to reveal only another mask of spectacle in Chaney’s famed make-up. Erik’s deformity becomes like the train that speedily approaches a “primitive” cinema audience:

Placed within a historical context and tradition, the first spectators’ experience reveals not a childlike belief, but an undisguised awareness (and delight in) film’s illusionistic capabilities….it was an encounter with modernity. From the start, the terror of that image uncovered a lack, and promised only a phantom embrace. The train collided with no one. It was, as Gorky said, a train of shadows, and the threat that it bore was freighted with emptiness (832).

Surprisingly, although the film is set in a distant setting and time (nineteenth-century France), it seems to be grappling with many modernist anxieties about truth and spectacle, abstraction, representation, and reality. Opera, a medium that uses music as the primary mode of expression, in a silent medium seems to exemplify a profound frustration with the limits of artistic expression. Furthermore, the film suggests that for all the claims of cinema as a newfound, more truthful medium, the viewer tears away the mask only to find another mask of spectacle in Chaney’s make-up. The spectacles of the film, the crowds, the sets, the horrific makeup, are at once the most familiar and unsettling quality of the Hollywood, because they ultimately suggest that there may be no end of artifice. The novel manages the dynamic between reality and fiction through a
dialogue between investigative mystery conventions and the fantastic, unknowable realms of Gothic convention. In the film adaptation, this is translated into a dialogue between a closed narrative (which like the novel ultimately contains the threat in Erik with his somewhat ambiguous demise), and disruptive moment of anti-narrative spectacle which calls self-reflective attention to its artifices and sublimates that tension of unknowable sights and sounds into visual and aural expressionism.

The Musical

After the release of Universal’s film, many adaptations of the story followed on both stage and screen. However, by far the most popular and commercially successful adaptation to follow was Andrew Lloyd Webber’s musical theater version that opened on Broadway in 1986 and continues to run today (now the longest running show on Broadway). This adaptation draws heavily upon the visual style of the 1925 film, especially in the use of ominous cast shadows, the arrival of Red Death at the Masque Ball on the Paris Opera Grand Staircase, and the montage-style descent into the Phantom’s home in the cellars. This adaptation demonstrates quite a degree of respect to its major source texts (the novel and 1925 film) and yet it stands starkly apart in its tone. Like the novel and film, the musical grapples with distinctly modern anxieties about truth and lies, reality and spectacle, and expression and repression in words and film; however, the musical is a unique adaptation in that it is ultimately an unequivocal endorsement of artifice and spectacle. This theoretical trajectory, from anxieties about artifice to celebration of artifice, in adaptations of this text demonstrates the gradual twentieth
century transition from a modernist to post-modernist sensibility. To help define this more clearly, I will use Jameson’s classification of postmodernism from his essay, “Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,” throughout this section.

The musical *The Phantom of the Opera* is an example, in fact often the example, of the dominant Broadway style made prominent in the 1980s known as the megamusical. This Broadway phenomenon has been defined and analyzed extensively by Jessica Sternfeld. According to Sternfeld, the megamusical can be identified by state-of-the-art special effects, large and elaborate sets and costumes, sung-through, opera-reminiscent music (instead of the “stop-and-sing” style of Rogers and Hammerstein), epic subject matter from another place and time, often imported from London theater (epitomized by Andrew Lloyd Webber), and above all an overwhelming emphasis on escapism and spectacle.

It is not difficult to image how the *The Phantom of the Opera* text could be readily adapted into this musical format. Musical theater seems in fact the most suitable medium to explore a story about the sublime mysteries of music and theater. *The Phantom of the Opera* as a musical allows the text to perform at its most meta-textual, physically locating its audience in the haunted theater. Many little details of the staging carefully immerse the live audience into this space. Instead of the journalistic frame of the novel, the show begins with a prologue sequence set in 1911. On the sparsely lit stage, a ghostly auctioneer takes bids on the old contents of the opera house. The auctioneer draws the audience’s attention to the infamous chandelier that “figured in the famous disaster” of the Phantom of the Opera. He directs his porters to draw back the
sheets covering the restored chandelier to demonstrate its new wiring for electric light.

As the porters pull back the sheet:

There is an enormous flash, and the OVERTURE begins. During the Overture the opera house is restore to its earlier grandeur. The chandelier, immense and glittering, rises magically from the stage, finally hovering high above the stalls (Libretto, Prologue).

The Overture begins with the infamous 5-note descending chromatic scale on the organ that will signal “the Phantom of the Opera” for the rest of the show. During this theatrical “flashback” sequence, black sheets are drawn back to reveal a large, incredibly elaborate and golden proscenium arch depicting satyrs and nymphs in sexual positions. This golden, gaudy proscenium does not separate the space of the stage from the audience, but rather draws the audience into it, recreating the grandeur of theater-going from the nineteenth century, aristocratic Europe. The chandelier, now glittering with electric light, slowly ascends ominously over the heads of the audience, who will thus await its inevitable fall. This beginning is both very theatrical and cinematic, with the electric flash and musical jolt that signal that beginning of a flashback in which the theater transforms to its old grandeur before the audience’s eyes.

What immediately follows this transformation is a diegetic performance of the Opera House’s Hannibal, and the prima donna Carlotta displays an enemy’s bleeding severed head as she begins her boisterous aria. The actual audience serves as the opera’s diegetic audience. As Sternfeld and Hogle have noted, this allows middle-class audiences to enjoy the old-world sophistication of opera, while also positioning themselves as superior to it, smirking at the overblown dramatics of opera, exemplified in the histrionic outbursts of the prima donna Carlotta. After this comically overblown
performance, the actors all suddenly drop character, and the large elephant set-piece is wheeled around to reveal two stagehands enjoying their lunch inside. This humorous moment embodies the musical’s game of presenting legitimate moments of opera, only to comically undermine them as a passé artifice. The comic relief of the show is consistently provided in the antics of the opera-folk characters: Carlotta and her tenor lover Piangi, and the arrogant and bumbling opera managers. The overblown dramatics of the two “Notes” numbers and “Prima Donna” encourage the audience to laugh at the dated melodrama of the opera, particularly in the managers’ winking line:

Who’d believe a diva  
Happy to relieve a  
chorus girl, who’s gone  
and slept with the patron?  
Raoul and the soubrette  
Entwined in love’s duet!  
Although he must demur,  
He must have been with her!  
You’d never get away  
With all this in a play,  
But if it’s loudly sung  
And in a foreign tongue  
It’s just the story  
Audiences adore, in  
Fact a perfect  
Opera! (Libretto, Scene 8, “Prima Donna”)

The play allows an audience to revisit an art form somewhat estranged from the modern audiences of Broadway megamusicals, while also laughing at it from a modern sensibility. In an interesting way, this audience seems akin to Gunning’s not-so-incredulous early film audience, who enjoys the spectacle, but only because of a modern sensibility that recognizes it as such and chooses to embrace this artifice regardless.
The play immerses the audience in the action both to thrill and as comic relief. This is most apparent in the scene preceding the debut of the Phantom’s opera *Don Juan Triumphant*. In an attempt to trap his adversary, Raoul positions policemen to secure the doors of the (actual) theater (again the audiences enters the diegesis), and hides a marksman in the orchestra pit to fire his pistol “when the time comes.” The Phantom’s voice is then projected from various speakers in the house, and in the confusion, the marksman fires his gun, which amusingly startles the audience. Like the 1925 film, the musical makes the audience participants as active voyeurs. The musical breaks the fourth wall as a kind of self-aware thrill, one that entertains because it revels in its own theatricity. On one hand, these moments act as a kind of Bretchian device, self-reflexively calling attention to the artifices of theater. On the other hand, by including the audience it further immerses them into the diegetic space. Paradoxically, these moments which break the fourth wall both alienate and integrate the audience into the musical’s diegetic space.

So is this musical a parody of the theatrics of grand opera and melodrama? I would say this is only half true. To use Jameson’s language, while a parody would deploy these theatrics to create a critical commentary, the tone of Webber’s play is much more akin to postmodern pastiche, which Jameson defines as:

random cannibalization of all the styles of the past, the play of random stylistic allusion….This omnipresence of pastiche is not incompatible with a certain humor, however, nor is it innocent of all passion: it is at the least compatible with addiction—with a whole historically original consumer’s appetite for a world transformed into sheer images of itself and for pseudo-events and “spectacles” (67).

Webber uses musical language from across the history of Western music, pairing atonal art-music with imitations of eighteenth century opera, 1980s pop rock, and Broadway
ballads. If Leroux mixed literary genres, then Webber freely mixes musical genres.

Webber as a postmodern “producer of culture has nowhere to turn but to the past: the imitation of dead styles, speech through all the masks and voices stored up in the imaginary museum of a now dead culture” (Jameson 65). Webber’s use of pastiche points to a

The postmodernists have in fact been fascinated precisely by this whole ‘degraded’ landscape of schlock and kitsch…of the grade-B Hollywood film…paperback categories of the gothic and the romance…the murder mystery and science-fiction or fantasy novel: material they no longer simply ‘quote,’ as a Joyce or a Mahler might have done, but incorporate into their very substance (55).

The audience relates nostalgically to only the artifices and aesthetics of a historical and cultural past. The audience consumes these different musical and theatrical modes with fervor. The diegetic performances of different musical forms—from the Meyerbeerian Hannibal performance and Mozart-inspired Il Muto to the atonal avante-garde music in Don Juan Triumphant—strip down these musical movements to only their aesthetic value, commodifying these past art forms as easy, readily available signs of “high art.” It seems very appropriate that the play begins with an auction of dusty objects from the Opera House (the word “Sold!” is the very first line), literalizing Jameson’s “cannibalization” and commoditization of the decaying signs of art and culture from the past.

But to engage this argument fully, I must address the more expressive sections of the musical, that arguably should be taken more seriously than the opera sequences. How is the Phantom finally given a musical voice in this postmodern context? In The Phantom of the Opera, “Webber seemed to set out to write more serious work with a more sophisticated score, one that dealt with the human condition instead of the situations
of demigods, cats, and trains of his previous repertoire” (Walsh 173). If the comically histrionic sections borrow their musical language from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century opera (with performances reminiscent of the operas of Mozart, Salieri, and Meyerbeer), what musical language does Webber employ for his serious characters, namely in the love triangle of the Phantom, Christine, and Raoul?

For his “serious” orchestrations, Webber creates a complex web of musical motifs that intersect and vary for an appropriate emotional effect. This motif structure continues from the tradition of Wagner’s romantic operas, to the musical cues of melodrama, to thematic film scoring in the twentieth century. For Webber, these motifs do not have closed symbolic referents; rather, each is loosely associated with an abstract theme. Critics Snelson and Sternfeld have both performed the important work of tracking these themes through the score and arriving at their associative meanings. Two crucial examples of these musical themes included the “mystery chords,” the 4-note chromatic descending line that signals “the phantom of the opera.” Each scholar praises Webber for creating an integrated tapestry of themes that give the narrative unity and motion. Like the novel that elaborately weaves together various archetypes and genres, the musical creates a kind of musical tapestry, creating a library of themes that can be used and altered as the dramatic situation requires. The importance of this motif technique is that, in contrast to the music of the opera sections that quote dated musical styles to heighten a distanced theatricity, Webber’s romantic ballads and underscoring act upon the unconscious emotions of the audience in a way very similar to film scoring. Interestingly, Webber’s romantic scoring is as much indebted to musical history as his opera quotations. Many musical critics have noted Webber’s use of the romantic

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5 See Appendix, Figure 1 and 2.
compositions of Puccini, especially for *The Phantom of the Opera*. These Puccini-colored pop ballads aim to create emotional depth in its characters, specifically Raoul, Christine, and the Phantom. Yet, one of the greatest criticisms of the show is its overblown emotionality, and its ultimately flat characterizations.

This flattening can be attributed to the musical palette of the show. According to Walsh, “The charge of being a pastiche artist had dogged Lloyd Webber for so long that it must have amused him to embrace it wholeheartedly in the work that, paradoxically, turned out to be his most original score” (180). The juxtaposition of these styles—1980s pop rock, opera, lush romantic leitmotifs, and atonal serial music—ultimately has a leveling effect. Even recognizing that the romantic ballads garner more emotional weight than the other styles, this unrelentingly thick orchestration levels out the emotions of the characters to the same high volume. This is most recognizable in the ballads that the Phantom and Raoul each use to woo Christine. The Phantom and Raoul stand as polar binaries, Raoul as public, fairy tale love, and the Phantom as forbidden, carnal love. This is reflected in the lyrics of their respective ballads: the Phantom tempting Christine with the darkness of seduction in “The Music of the Night,” while Raoul soothes Christine with imagery of light and security in “All I Ask of You”: “no more talk of darkness,/ let daylight dry your tears” (Libretto, Act I, Scene 10). However, the music of these two ballads are harmonically identical, as Snelson illustrates.6 This musically suggests that they are merely two sides of the same coin, each pulling Christine through the emotional manipulation of romantic music. Many of Webber’s detractors point to this over-use of same generic themes, with one commenting: “Mr. Lloyd Webber has again written a score so generic that most of the songs could be reordered and redistributed among the

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6 See Appendix, Figure 3.
characters without altering the show’s story or meaning” (Rich, C19). When all the earnest, character-expressive music begins to run indiscriminately together, and when taken in juxtaposition with the sillier opera-pastiche sections of the musical, the audience cannot help but recognize that the melodrama of the love triangle and the histrionics of dated opera convention are equal in their artificiality and theatricality. The opera-pastiche moments of overt and self-reflective spectacle undermine the earnestness of the narrative-driven sections, disrupting it much like the moments of cinema of attractions in the film adaptation. The musical embodies Jameson’s definition that the postmodern work is “not incompatible with a certain humor, however, nor is it innocent of all passion” (67). It is not campy, but its reliance of the stuff of B-movie horrors and its equating of low pop-rock musical material and high opera imitations almost verges on camp. Webber has been quoted to say of Leroux’s novel: “It can’t make up its mind if it’s a melodrama or a romance or just a good thriller. Frankly, it’s a piece of hokum. But it works” (Kingston). Critics are eager to draw the same conclusion about Webber’s adaptation. At its heart, the musical unapologetically indulges in the brazen emotionality and grandeur of theatrical melodrama, and takes itself seriously in that endeavor, while making self-aware gestures of its own artificiality.

Even in the earnest, character-expressing musical numbers, the music that might suggest a kind of character dynamism ultimately displays a kind of emotional stagnancy, not unlike the stock characterizations that are mocked in the opera-pastiche sections. For instance, the ballad “Wishing You Were Somehow Here Again” seems to grant Christine a surprising amount of autonomy. In the novel, this scene appears early, and therefore is linked to the limited perspective of Raoul, who can only catch rare glimpses of this
midnight rendezvous between Christine in Erik. In the musical, however, this scene becomes Christine’s power ballad, expressing in her own words (and more importantly in her own melodic structures) her struggle to overcome her grief over her long-lost father that has stunted her emotional maturity. Christine’s uncharacteristic self-recognition ends in a rousing forte key-change in which she resolves “no more memories, no more silent tears/ no more gazing across the wasted years./ Help me say goodbye” (Libretto, Act II, Scene 5). However, this determination is undermined melodically, because this final section is melodically reminiscent of “Angel of Music”—the entrancing theme that connects Christine’s grief to her susceptible position to the Phantom’s seduction.7 She is then immediately seduced once more with the Phantom’s full reprise of his seduction song “Angel of Music.” Whatever emotional development that “Wishing You Were Somehow Here Again” suggests is immediately cancelled by the repeated melodramatic themes that reinforce again and again the static gendered roles that the musical inherits from its cultural past.

This points to a fundamental shift in the The Phantom of the Opera text from the anxieties and distrusts of artifices that haunts its more modernist novel and film, to a more postmodern sensibility. Using Jameson’s classification of postmodernism in his essay, Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, Webber’s musical marks several shifts to postmodernity in the text:

However, it must equally be stressed that [a postmodern work’s] own offensive features—from obscurity and sexually explicit material to psychological squalor and overt expressions of social and political defiance, which transcend anything that might have been imagined at the most extreme moments of high modernism—no longer scandalize anyone and are not only received with the greatest complacency but have themselves become institutionalized and are at one with the official culture of Western society (56).

7 See Appendix Figure 4.
This quotation can be readily applied to the musical, which more than any other adaptation, sexualizes the Phantom and his power over Christine, while at the same time allowing the show to be considered a family-friendly option for Broadway-goers. For years a large billboard in Times Square featured the iconic mask and rose logo with the ambiguous words “Remember Your First Time,” toying with the show’s long life on Broadway and a sexual innuendo.

The effect of Webber’s flattened pastiche-centric musical palette can best be seen in the “Point of No Return” scene. In this climatic scene in Act II, the opera company is forced to perform the Phantom’s opera *Don Juan Triumphant*. Webber takes on the ambitious task of setting the Phantom’s unperformed masterpiece of the novel into actual music. The novel describes this music very specifically:

On the desk was a music-book covered with red notes. I asked leave to look at it, and, on the first page, read, ‘*Don Juan Triumphant*’… ‘Will you play me something out of your *Don Juan Triumphant*?’ I asked, thinking to please him. ‘You must never ask me that.’ He said, in a gloomy voice. ‘I will play you Mozart, if you like, which will only make you weep; but my *Don Juan* burns, Christine; and yet he is not struck by fire from Heaven…. You see, Christine, there is some music so terrible that it consumes all who approach it. Fortunately, you have not come to that music yet, for you would lose all your pretty coloring and nobody would know you when you returned to Paris. Let us sing something operatic, Christine Daae!’ He spoke these last words as though he was flinging an insult at me (139).

And immediately following the unmasking scene:

Presently I heard the sound of the organ; and then I began to understand Erik’s contemptuous phrase when he spoke about operatic music. What I now heard was utterly different from what had charmed me up to then. *His Don Juan Triumphant* (for I had not a doubt but that he had rushed to his masterpiece to forget the horror of the moment) seemed to me at first one awful, long, magnificent sob. But, little by little, it expressed every emotion, every suffering of which mankind is capable. It intoxicated me; and I opened the door that separated us…. ‘Erik,’ I cried, “Show me your face without fear! I swear that you
are the most unhappy and sublime of men; and, if ever again I shiver when I look at you, it will be because I am thinking of the splendor of your genius! (142)

Once again, the novel sets up this notion of “unhearable” music, the Phantom’s music that could potentially harm and that helps him regain Christine’s obedience despite the horrific unmasking. This music is explicitly distinguished from “operatic” music of Mozart, as if this expressive music makes “operatic” music empty and artificial by comparison. The novel sets up a dichotomy between artificial expression (here in Mozart) and forbidden, expressive music, thus reinforcing the novel’s binaries of real and artifice. In the musical, however, the performance of this piece combines all different musical modes, diegetic performance and nondiegetic musical expression blend into one continuous performance.

Webber takes the challenge of setting this dangerous, expressive “masterpiece” to actual music, and interestingly, he turns first to atonal, experimental music. Snelson provides an adequate reason for this creative decision:

The story requires that the music of the Phantom’s opera is to be that of the outsider, off-putting and jarring, a strong contrast with the other musical worlds. Through the new, modern musical world that foreshadows techniques of Debussy and Schönberg that parallel his belief in the new vocal sound of Christine. This musical modernism is not just a threat to the operatic stage—Piangi cannot cope with this new musical world, failing to sing a whole-tone phrase—but the symbol of the Phantom’s more general threat to a wider status quo; fear of him represents fear of another unknown: the future (104).

This inclusion of experimental, modernist musical settings make Webber’s thematic palette even more diverse. Does this inclusion of modernist music re-invoke the anxieties of Expressionism raised in the novel, and especially the film? I believe this claim would only be valid if the atonal settings were used as the Phantom’s expressive musical voice. However, these modernist themes are contained rather strictly as performance, rather then
emotive musical language. This can be seen especially in the “Point of No Return” scene. Like in the passage from the novel, the Phantom’s operatic setting of Don Juan stands directly against Mozart’s musical setting of Don Giovanni—a major source of inspiration for the earlier opera pastiche performance of Il Muto. In this eleventh-hour number, the Phantom has forced the opera company to perform his work, Don Juan Triumphant, and in this “play within a play” moment, Christine performed the soon-to-be-seduced character Aminta. The Phantom has quietly murdered the leading actor, and now stands in on-stage for Don Juan (of course disguised in the Don Juan costume). The musical number begins with same invocation of modernist tones (with dissonant cluster chords), but soon moves into the more melodic, minor ballad “The Point of No Return.” Like many moments of the musical, it is unclear if this music is part of the diegetic performance of Don Juan Triumphant, or if it has shifted into a non-diegetic expressive moment between Christine and the Phantom. Diegesis and non-diegesis become further complicated as it becomes obvious that this “performance” of Don Juan Triumphant is a reflection of the emotional impasse of the characters (and a foreshadowing of the stand-off in the final scene). Like Mozart’s Don Giovanni, the Phantom has switched places with another and adopted a disguise to win his next sexual conquest. As Snelson puts it: “Throughout the scene, as each sings of an impending choice, of no way back, the audience in the theater is drawn in by the duality of Christine/Aminta and Phantom/Don Juan and the consequent ambiguity of the lyrics” (115).

To add to this mix of musical languages (atonal art-music and a more conventional Broadway ballad), at the conclusion of “Point of No Return,” the Phantom then sings a brief reprise of “All I Ask of You,” the pop ballad love duet between Raoul
and Christine from the end of Act I. Now he has clearly broken his Don Juan character (addressing Christine by her true name, not her character name), but strangely adopts a new mask in borrowing Raoul’s love theme. How does the Phantom even know this melody? True, he secretly observes Raoul and Christine’s love duet in Act I, but according to the convention of musical theater, the audience would presume that love ballad was a non-diegetic expression, not an actually performance (since the script never indicates that Raoul is in fact a singer). Yet, the Phantom re-invokes this theme here, calling into question whether this, too, is a moment of diegetic performance or an inward emotion expressed in song. In any case, he is not able to finish this theme because on the last note Christine pulls away his mask to finally reveal his deformity both to the diegetic audience of the opera house and the actual audience in the theater.\(^8\) Immediately the recognizable 5-note, chromatic descent theme of “The Phantom of the Opera” is heard fully, making this moment the true unmasking moment of this adaptation. This declaration of the horror theme connects it again to the melodramatic tradition, and specifically to this moment in the film adaptation, which would have a similar horror music cue at this revelation moment. The musical carefully forestalls this unmasking moment until there is a diegetic audience to react, because unlike with film, the disfiguring make-up cannot register effectively on stage in a large Broadway theater. The Phantom, now defeated instead of “triumphant,” then seizes Christine and vanishes in another moment of stage magic. This setting ultimately neutralizes the horror of this pivotal unmasking scene as it functions in the novel and the film. This entire scene has framed the drama of the characters within a diegetic, operatic performance, where several

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\(^8\) There is another unmasking scene in Act I in the cellars of the opera, but it is carefully blocked so that his deformity is not fully revealed until this moment in Act II.
musical languages (atonal art-music, Broadway melodies, pop ballads, and movie-house organ cues) compete for legitimacy. Therefore this unmasking moment, which in the novel and film function as a kind of turning point between seductive artifices and horrifying realities, is only another spectacle in a long series of competing performances.

As with the novel and film, the unmasking scene becomes the fulcrum of the adaptation. But while in the novel the unmasking scene initiates a transition from the seduction “secret” of the phantom to the horrifying reality of the man, this moment does not in the musical reveal anything about the true nature of the character. The film begins to transform the unmasking into a spectacle, suggesting that behind the mask of artifice there only another mask (Chaney’s make-up). Yet this moment in the film is also exploited for its horror, its shock-value, and most importantly the thrill of artifice. However, in the musical, the unmasking moment is not utilized for horror or thrill particularly, but rather as just another layer of performance. The audience is distanced, with all the shock of the moment registering with the faux audience of on-stage characters which reinforce the artifice of this performance.

So while the other adaptations concern themselves with the anxiety of removing the mask, and the horrors of what lies underneath, the musical is preoccupied with only the mask of artifice itself. This is the only one of the three adaptations where the Phantom has no real name but the “phantom.” This adaptation is really about the “phantoms” of our cultural past, that remains as powerful and affective (like Puccini’s romantic strains in particular) as they are estranged from modern sensibilities. Webber juxtaposes the aesthetics of melodrama, Gothicism, Romanticism, B-movie horror films,
and all the phantoms and masks of a shared cultural past, which effectively levels these traditions into an easily digested night of theatrical entertainment.

All this is embodied in the final tableau. The Phantom, having released Christine and Raoul, sits on a throne and covers himself with a sheet. When Christine’s friend Meg reaches the chair and removes the sheet, nothing remains but the mask, which is illuminated with a spotlight over the last “mystery theme” chords of the orchestra. The man behind the mask is inconsequential, immaterial; we are left with nothing but the mask, and the masque that is the musical.

Conclusion

_The Phantom of the Opera_ has been a pervading presence in popular twentieth-century entertainment because it is a profoundly meta-narrative text. The text is at its core an examination of the performing arts: the pleasures, the powers, and very often the dangers of forbidden sights and sounds. It is no surprise that this text was quickly adapted into the visual medium of silent film, and then the audio-visual medium of the theater, because of the text’s great potential for self-reflexivity and captivating spectacle. Each text inevitably grapples with the archetypal tension between reality and performance, real and spectacle, true face and masks. This tension consistently comes to focus on Erik’s disfigured face, which is at once horrifyingly real and a spectacle. However, one can trace a shifting attitude about which is superior: the real or the spectacle. Leroux’s original novel is marked by a strange dynamic as both a Gothic melodrama (with artificially heightened emotions and stock characterizations) and a
detective fiction (whose major narrative thrust is aimed at scientifically debunking the
truth behind the artifice). Leroux is rather critical of the masks that socialites wear in the
public sphere: the narrator comments, “In Paris, our lives are one masked ball” (49). This
detective style privileging truth over spectacle continues in the silent film, but is
profoundly undermined by its cinematic medium, which intrinsically champions the
spectacle of the moving picture (and Chaney’s magnificent face-shifting game). Unlike
in the novel, where the reader activates the text he or she reads, both the film and the
musical performs the sights and sound for and on the receiver. This is at the core of the
horror film genre: the viewer anticipates the sublime thrill of seeing that which is
typically unseeable: murder, rape, and horrifying disfigurement. The moment of horror is
an anticipated surprise, somewhere between wanting and not wanting to see. That
famous moment of revelation of Chaney’s horrific make-up is one of the most iconic
scares in silent film history—and image permanently burned into popular culture and the
social conscious. Finally, the Webber musical is unapologetically sensational, taking no
time to explain scientifically how the Phantom’s magic tricks are performed; it even ends
dramatically with a magic trick. The musical makes a game of its spectacle, at once
deconstructing and constructing the spectacle of the mega-(and meta-) musical. The
masquerade scene, originally the focus of Leroux’s condemnation of social masks,
becomes an act-opening ensemble celebration of spectacle. To Leroux’s narrator, masks
are deceitful, hiding the true emotional experience of the masqueraders. The musical
transforms this scene into a huge chorus number (in fact the only true ensemble number)
that opened the second act with a boisterous celebration of mask-wearing, inviting the
audience to “take your fill, let the spectacle astound you” (Libretto, Act II, Scene 1).
This shift perhaps marks one of the most fundamental shifts in artistic representation in the twentieth century: from the distrust of untrue representation and search for underlying truth of modernism to the eager celebration of artifice of post-modernism.

For all the changes of content, medium, and cultural context that the text has experienced since its beginning in 1909, there are surprisingly similar tensions that continue to operate even into the twenty-first century. In this way it is not difficult to envision The Phantom of the Opera as a model of Bazin’s conception of a nebulous, cross-media text. I have tried to articulate some of the fundamental changes that occur in the switch from word, to cinema, to stage, but what I continue to return to is this sense that each media translates very similar tensions that make it a significant twentieth-century text. In the conclusion of his analysis, Jerrold E. Hogle also grapples with the question: what is the text’s lasting significance and its cultural function in the twentieth century? He starts with the worthwhile observation that it repeats age-old mythic patterns in which a young woman on the verge of maturity must confront a dark, cave-dwelling, sexually charged, paternalistic “wolf”-figure in a sort of rite of passage, as in the stories of Pluto and Persephone, Psyche and Cupid, Death and the Maiden, Beauty and the Beast, and even Little Red Riding Hood (233).

Besides its Freudian patterns, the text combines the “cultural pattern for journeys into primordial or unconscious depths” with the fascination for “going backstage” to discovers the deeply hidden secrets behind the glitz and glamour of upper-class splendor (Hogle 233). In this way I believe each adaptation somewhat anticipates the next, and each borrow narrative techniques from the media of older adaptations. For instance, the film adaptation models much of its imagery after five oil-painting plates that accompanied the American print of Leroux’s novel. The musical also borrows heavily
from cinematic techniques, especially in its ellipses of time (including flashbacks and montages). Each adaptation becomes increasingly meta-textual, as if each adaptation becomes increasing secure, and even presumptuous, in representing the unknowable sensations of the original novel.

The tension that fuels this text’s continuing resurgences in popular culture is what Hogle identifies as “the growing indistinction in our culture between ‘fiction’ and ‘reality’” (238). I have shown how each text grapples with this fiction and reality, epitomized in the relationship between the man and the mask in the Phantom character. I have tried to trace a shifting attitude towards this relationship, with the earlier adaptations focusing on the horror of spectacle (realized fictions), and the musical celebrating the beauty of spectacle against any semblances of reality. However, even accepting this difference, even in 1909 with the original novel the audience seems keenly aware of the game of spectacle and willing to accept this manipulation in spite of itself. In the novel, this exists as a linguistic tension between the language of detective fiction, Gothic fiction, and also journalism. In an era of high-profile yellow journalism, readers are keenly aware of narrative manipulation and sensationalism. The thrill of spectacle then naturally follows in the Hollywood film and megamusical. Spectacle is the language of twentieth-century popular culture, and, paradoxically, the text explores the distinctly modern problems of representation while making a spectacle of an estranged nineteenth-century past. It is no surprise that *The Phantom of the Opera* retains cultural relevance today in the digital age of technological reproduction and communication. What remains to be seen is if the *The Phantom of the Opera* will continue to be adapted into the twenty-first century. As the culture increasingly accepts this conflation of “reality” and “fiction” as a
norm, will the text still be able to capitalize any thrill, anxiety, or entertainment from this difference?
Appendix

Figure 1: “Mystery Chords”

These are the closing chords that end the musical number “Music of the Night” as well as the end of the show (Snelson 101). While the Phantom holds the tonic C-sharp, these chords modulate strangely until they finally resolve into C-sharp major. This delayed resolution points to Webber’s influences in Romantic opera (particularly Puccini and Wagner). Snelson and Sternfeld agree that these chords come to represent mystery and awe, and is therefore rather appropriate for the final tableaux.

Figure 2: “Phantom” theme

This is the opening overture theme, which provides an example of the “Phantom” theme, the 5-note chromatic descending line, which is often played on the organ (Snelson 97). This dramatic theme is closely linked to the melodramatic cues from theater, and even more importantly, in silent film cue accompaniments.
Here Snelson illustrates how the Phantom’s love ballad “Music of the Night” and Raoul’s love ballad “All I Ask of You,” are very harmonically related with identical intervals (Snelson 99). This demonstrates how Webber’s thematic material begins to run together in the fabric of his orchestrations, so that individual character sentiments becomes indistinguishable.

Figure 4: “Angel of Music” and “Wishing You Were Somehow Here Again” Comparison
The first staff is from the beginning of “Angel of Music,” the musical theme which signifies the Phantom’s seductive power over Christine (Vocal Selections, 16). The second staff is an excerpt from the dramatic finale of “Wishing You Were Somehow Here Again” (Vocal Selections, 62). The lyrics of this passage suggests that Christine is declaring her autonomy from the Phantom (by resolving here grief over her long-dead father): “No more memories, no more silent tears, no more gazing across the wasted years. Help me say goodbye” (Libretto, Act II, Scene 5). However, this declaration is completely undermined musically because it is strikingly similar harmonically to the entrancement theme of “Angel of Music,” thus signaling a return to same power formula and demonstrating the emotional stagnancy of Webber’s adaptation.
Works Cited


