

# “No One Ever Sees the Angel”: Adapting *The Phantom of the Opera*

Leslie McMurtry

There are many ways that interpretations of *The Phantom of the Opera* (1910)<sup>i</sup> lend themselves to the Gothic mode. The plethora of adaptations over the past century<sup>ii</sup>, with varying degrees of similarity to the source text, have taken on a life of their own. Criticism of *POTO* is still relatively underdeveloped; as Ann C. Hall notes, while the novel has been critiqued through its associations (mainly its links to Gothic fiction and its Freudian and Jungian interpretations), these readings tend to “diminish” author Gaston Leroux’s skill and readers’ enjoyment (Hall 2).

This chapter will not focus on Freudian or Jungian readings, but instead I hope to explore an element of the Leroux novel and the adaptations that has been overlooked, and in so doing, give some suggestions as to what qualities have contributed to making this story so enduring. Is Cormac Newark right when he argues that *POTO* resists adaptation as well as definition (75)? One might start this exploration with the Phantom of the title himself, Erik. Part of Erik’s giftedness as Leonard Wolf refers to it is his musical acumen as represented and interpreted through his voice, whereas his monstrosity is expressed through his physical repulsiveness (2). One particularly powerful axis in *POTO* is between the hideous, decayed appearance of Erik and his astonishingly beautiful, ethereal voice. Ann C. Hall brings this disjunction beyond just the character of Erik and suggests that the novel and adaptations “require [. . .] a kind of double vision,” or indeed, an engagement with two senses that do not always harmonize (3). Erik’s physical ugliness is horrible, but he can use his vocal/musical beauty/genius for good or for evil.

“Everything is divided; everyone is tortured” in *POTO* (Hall 4). As we define *POTO*’s and Erik’s Gothic engagement with the senses of sight and sound that do not always harmonize, we underline a defining theme of Gaston Leroux’s fiction—that appearances can never be relied upon. Why is *POTO* so attractive and so successful across media and time? Those who undervalue the

source text and target texts would argue that it is neither, a mere “spectral palimpsest of textual phantoms” (Shah “No Ordinary Skeleton,” 9). Such criticism ignores its longevity and its ability to cross and re-cross different strands of media. Some critics do not see any specific or special “value” in the text, likening it more to a fad or a fluke, or that it is unworthy of its long-standing popular appeal, much less any critical analysis. I would argue that there are a number of dynamics in the core of the *POTO* story which emerge from the source text, the 1910 Leroux novel, but are continually reinvented in the subsequent adaptations, which make it unique and help explain its endurance.

Firstly, I would point to the characters of *POTO*, particularly the three principals (Erik the Phantom, Christine Daaé, and Raoul de Chagny), though also characters like the Daroga and Madame Giry. The ambiguity of these characters sets them apart from their counterparts in Leroux’s contemporary writing in the traditions of both French *romans populaires* and English-language Gothic horror/melodrama. While not ciphers, these characters lend themselves to shades of grey in interpretation. Is Christine a fainting damsel in distress or a feminist? Is Raoul a hero, a chauvinist bully, or an inexperienced young man? Is the Phantom a Romantic anti-hero or an unredeemable freak, whose “soul [is where] the true distortion lies” (Hart and Stilgoe)? All of these interpretations can easily be inferred from Leroux’s text and are refracted in varieties of re-combination in target texts. While the principals themselves are echoes of the broader theme (or Ur-text) of Beauty and the Beast (Áarne-Thompson folktale type 425C), they have enough individuality to make *POTO* its own recognizable story without drifting away into the realm of myth.

Secondly, the theatricality of the setting of *POTO*—within the Paris Opéra—is exceptionally suited to Leroux’s determination to expose the layer below the surface of society’s masks. It is also wholly appropriate for creating *mise en scène* and plays-within-plays in audio-visual adaptations such as those on stage, on television, and on film, and represents a unique challenge for media like audio drama. The centrality of music to the core themes also makes most adaptations eminently performable. The theatrical setting of *POTO* also gives license for the story to exhibit larger-than-life emotions and present higher stakes than stories outside of “melodrama.” Indeed, while a “high drama of uncommonly beautiful people histrionically acting out a familiar tale of passion, corruption and

revenge” (McCabe and Akass 5) could describe *POTO*, the fact that it actually describes the typical *telenovela* plot underlines how vastly appealing *POTO*’s “basal feelings” (Lippert 88) might be. With this in mind, we will examine the different strategies employed in a sample of the many adaptations that have followed in the wake of *POTO*’s publication in 1910: the 1925 Universal silent film, the long-running Andrew Lloyd Webber musical (1986-) (and its 2004 film), and the audio drama adaptation (2007) from Big Finish Audio Productions. Although sound drama is frequently marginalized as “television without pictures,” audio drama is an excellent mode of adaptation due to its inherent conduit directly into the mind, imagery, and emotion. The value that Leroux saw in his tale—beyond that of entertainment—was in highlighting duality while presenting ambiguous characters caught up in grand spectacle framed by music that was, to him and his original audience, familiar. Gauging this through how the adaptations represent the duality of the Phantom himself (sight vs sound) and how they interpret characters’ ambiguity, I present three strategies adaptors have used. If we follow Hazette’s formulation of adaptation as “an ideologically charged journey during which archetypal structures and figures are dynamically translated and surreptitiously transmitted,” we recognize that *POTO*’s unique attractions create great room for innovation (59). Through this lens, I acknowledge Newark’s notion of resistance to adaptation while presenting the many successes achieved by the adaptations.

## **Sight vs Sound in Leroux**

*POTO*’s author, Gaston Leroux (1868-1927), is principally known in France for creating detective Joseph Rouletabille in *The Mystery of the Yellow Room* (1908), though Leroux wrote an immense amount of journalistic copy, dozens of novels that crossed genre boundaries, and stage plays. Despite a general belief in visuality as the supreme sense of the Gothic, sound is frequently evoked by Gothic of many kinds. “Ghosts are eminently audible in Gothic” for “sound without source suggests spectrality” (van Elferen 429, 430). Leroux, like many celebrated writers of the Gothic, was essentially middle class in his beliefs and politics, yet, as Renée Faubion notes, the text is

unusually good at ridiculing, at failing to tip its hand. This seems to be underlined by a strategy of disconnect between the evidence of sight and the evidence of hearing.

Duality defined Leroux. Robert de Flers wrote in *Figaro* in his review of Leroux's 1911 stage play (by far his most successful), *L'Homme qui a vu le diable*: "How can M. Gaston Leroux, who is one of the cuddliest and jolliest men I know, be so cruel as to create such nightmares?" (Lamy 55). If Leroux was aware of the dualities in life, he also understood the importance of using sound in his works. Crucially, in *POTO*, Erik is heard by many, but almost never seen. " 'Exactly!' " exclaims the young dancer Meg Giry, " 'You don't see him, the ghost! [ . . . ] My mama has never seen the ghost, but she has heard him' " (Leroux<sup>iii</sup> 22). "All things considered, who had seen him? After all, the opera was full of men in black evening dress who weren't ghosts. But this particular set of dress clothes had a characteristic feature: it was a skeleton" (15). Much of the humor of the novel is derived from Madame Giry, the concierge of Erik's special box, and her adventures with the invisible but charmingly polite ghost, infuriating the opera's managers. Giry, like Christine, emphasizes that Erik's voice is both emphatically that of a man but also that it sounds "sweet": " 'He has the voice of a man, oh! A sweet-sounding man's voice!' " (Leroux 59).

In all versions of the story, Erik and Christine connect first through sound not sight. The Angel of Music, as described by Christine's father, is an aural being only: "No one ever sees the Angel; but he is heard by those who are meant to hear him" (Bair 48). Raoul notes, "I understood all when I learned that Christine had not yet seen him" (Bair 199). Erik is not the only one for whom sound may paint an entirely different picture than sight. From Raoul's perspective, "Christine's angelic and soulful voice might be hiding the heart of a whore" (Hall 23) through the first half of the book—a salient example of interpretations of this character, who may be condemned as a chauvinist for his double standards or merely understood as a jealous, ardent lover. Sound and its perception transforms the callow Raoul into an eavesdropper, something he shamefully admits later (Leroux 35).

In Poe's "The Facts of the Case of M. Valdemar" (1845), "the body does not decay but it, or something, can speak, uttering the impossible words 'I am dead'" (Botting 122). Leroux's Erik responds in similar ways, with his costume at the Shrovetide masked ball declaring, "Don't touch me!

I am Red Death stalking abroad!” (Leroux 123) Erik’s physical form represents skeletal decay, yellowing flesh, the absence of eyes, nose, and lips, all of which he tries to correct with masks and smart evening clothes. He is described many times as having a “death’s-head,” “and *the absence of the nose was a horrible thing to see*” (Leroux 16, emphasis original). Erik’s eyes are “two great black holes like those in skulls” and his hands smell of death (ibid). When he makes a surprise appearance at an opera gala night, astonishing all who see him, “each person [who saw him] thought that if the dead might someday return to sit at the table of the living, they could not have shown a more macabre visage” (Leroux 41). Erik’s bizarre “living death” appearance recalls syphilis, porphyria, and exhibited freaks (such as John William Coffey, the Living Skeleton Dude).

Almost immediately after publication, depictions of *POTO* began to emphasise Erik’s ugliness over his beautiful voice. Edmond Claris, a friend of Leroux’s, advertised his newest novel, “*Un nouveau roman tout plein de cette délicieuse inquiétude qui fait frissonner le lecteur et qui évoque l’image effrayante, spirituelle et douloureusement humaine*” (quoted in Shah “Publication” 13). The first image of the Phantom, the cover by Adolphe Cossard of the 1910 publication, which directly inspired Marcel Allain’s *Fantomas* (1911), is both hideous and droll, depicting a grinning skull with wispy hair. Cossard’s illustration might reference the “frightening image” suggested by Claris but not the “spiritual and bittersweetly human” aspect he described. Thus, almost from the beginning, a dual vision/hearing was needed to interpret the Phantom, with the visual receiving more emphasis. How would Erik fare in target texts?

### ***The Phantom of the Opera and Adaptation Studies***

*The Phantom of the Opera* could really be said to “live” in its adaptations. Sevgi Şahin and Laurence Raw suggest that students can benefit from creating their own adaptations in a pedagogical context because they “learn how their subjectivities are inscribed” and that “the art of textual rewriting can help” us understand how experiences are constructed (72). I would argue the many adaptations of *POTO* over the past century provide a window into contemporary subjectivities and social, moral, and political constructions of identity.

It is also worth noting that all of the adaptations examined here are in English (as is much of current scholarship) rather than French, implying another level of (linguistic) translation. Translation “is not only a linguistic process; it involves more formal operations” (Şahin and Raw 74). Given the multitude of adaptations of *POTO*, I have selected four target texts whose way of responding to Erik in depicting him with regard to sound and sight reveal much about their approaches. As stated earlier, critics sometimes dismiss *POTO* as an extension of the Beauty and the Beast fairy tale/myth, with Christine standing in for Beauty and Erik for the Beast. While *POTO* does share some similarities, the story as written by Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont in the eighteenth century differs substantially from Leroux’s novel. For example, in Beaumont, we may wonder whether Beauty will fulfil her promise to the Beast to return and see him after he releases her, as we wonder whether Christine will return to see Erik after having surreptitiously gotten engaged to Raoul. However, in Beaumont’s moral instructional tale, Beauty’s task is to look past the superficial ugliness of the Beast to see that his kindness, goodness, virtue, and sweetness are more important than any other possible qualities in a husband (Murphy 240). Erik differs from the dim-witted, ugly but virtuous Beast in that his qualities of kindness, goodness, virtue, and sweetness are debatable, and Christine differs from Beauty in that she is not looking for a husband but wants to be a singer and continue her career.

Unorthodox approaches to adaptation studies as evinced by Bruhn and Ingvarsson might be of use regarding the value of adaptations of *POTO*. Bruhn suggests that “Any rewriting or adaptation of a text is always influencing the original work,” with the most obvious way that a target text changes the source text through changes in readers’ perceptions (70). It is undeniable that the source text of *POTO*, the 1910 novel, has been “re-written” in relation to the globally popular stage adaptation by Andrew Lloyd Webber (1986) and its subsequent “re-make” as a film (2004). A similar target-to-source-text relationship is at work to that of H.G. Wells’ 1898 novel *The War of the Worlds* and the much more famous and influential 1938 radio drama adaptation by Orson Welles. As Ingvarsson notes, even though it is obvious Wells’ purpose in 1898 was not to produce an adaptation of a 1938 radio drama, “the radio play nevertheless exerts an intertextual influence on the novel” (266). The other adaptations discussed here do so as well, to a lesser extent.

## Strategy I: No sound – Phantom of the Opera (1925)

The 1925 Universal film is the first surviving filmic adaptation of *POTO* that we have<sup>iv</sup>. In it, Erik was portrayed in what remains the most iconic performance of the role by Lon Chaney Snr. Interestingly, Chaney was no stranger to filmic adaptations of novels, his break-out role considered to have been in *The Penalty* (1920), a filmic adaptation of Gouverneur Morris' Gilded Age source text. There are obvious parallels between the anti-hero of *The Penalty*, maimed gangster Blizzard, and Erik the Phantom. As is well-known, Chaney was the child of deaf and mute parents and learned early “to use his body much as a dancer would, to create not only situation but also mood” (Anderson 15). Thus, while Chaney began his show-business career in vaudeville, he was particularly well-suited to the world of silent films. While he did have a strong and adept voice<sup>v</sup>, as proved by his one and only talkie, the remake of *The Unholy Three* (1930), he was not a trained singer, and “the springs, clamps, and disks that distorted” his face while playing Erik “would certainly have rendered articulate speech all but impossible” (Praver 218).

Thus the strategy for this adaptation was enforced by technology; how to portray the tender and human side of Erik without the ability to depict his voice? The film had to rely on intertitles, the vicissitudes of musical accompaniment or soundtracks dictated by where it was being shown<sup>vi</sup>, and Chaney's performance. While the musical accompaniment would have been different depending on where the film was shown, it is interesting to note that while in Leroux's original novel, Erik plays the organ and sings, the silent film permits only his visually arresting organ playing. “The immensity of the sound of a pipe organ seems well-suited to a horror film's sense of monumentality” post-*Phantom of the Opera* (Brown 5). Clearly, the filmmakers believed the *action* of playing the pipe organ, especially in the crucial unmasking scene, was powerful and important enough to retain in the silent adaptation. Moreover, this early filmic adaptation of the source text enforced the now-iconic *image* of the Phantom playing the pipe organ over and above any other scenes from the novel of his music-making.

Chaney was extraordinarily well-placed to depict Erik's pathos and perhaps even the beauty of his voice through visual performance alone. Chaney "remained one of the most consistent box office attractions of the 1920s specifically by playing freaks," creatures like Erik and Quasimodo who "defy anatomical description" (Blyn 37). Though makeup became Chaney's gimmick, he never relied entirely on it—as his multiple "straight" roles attest—"but used it only as the framework within which the character existed. He considered the mental and emotional aspects as well to give credence and depth to the whole" (Anderson 32). Chaney's famous ability to disappear into a crowd (as himself) echoes Erik's desire for bourgeois convention. To date, in no filmic adaptation has Erik ever expressed a desire to drive in the Bois de Boulogne with his wife as a reference to the very ordinariness of it, yet such sentiment is manifest in many interpretations of the role.

Chaney had to use his body and face to depict both the horror of Erik's deformity and the beauty of his ethereal voice; at the very least, the pathos that was the reflection of the bodily horror. As described in Leroux, Chaney's Erik "wore evening clothes all day long, as if he were always ready to take his seat in the 'haunted' box" (Babilas 148). Chaney had trained as a dancer, and despite the generally rigid carriage he brings to the role, he also lends to Erik a certain gracefulness, including "the unmistakable use of his expressive hands," (Anderson 70) which Michael Blake explicitly compares to music (quoted in *Lon Chaney: A Thousand Faces*). While David J. Skal amongst others has suggested a sexual/Freudian element to Chaney's rigid carriage as Erik, it perhaps also links back to the body horror described by Leroux; horror, Botting maintains, normally happens when a character has a physical encounter with death like touching a corpse: "It freezes human faculties, rendering the mind passive and immobilizing the body" (75).

There is no doubt that Chaney shocked and frightened through his facial makeup depiction of Erik, and this depiction remains the most similar audio-visual example of the source text's "death's-head." Although the startling made-up appearance vaguely evokes a corpse, it is not the face seen by Christine in Leroux. Nevertheless, as Skal has noted, horror films made after the First World War are inevitably influenced by veterans' disfigurement. Leroux wrote his Erik before the widespread reality of *mutilés de guerre*, but Chaney's Erik recalls their "smashed features, missing noses, and mouths



full of broken teeth” (Skal 66). Hence, unmistakably, the target text reworks ugliness and pathos based on real-world events that occurred between the writing of the source text and the filmic adaptation.

The 1925 film is the only surviving adaptation made in Leroux’s lifetime. Leroux was interested in film; he even wrote in a “para-text” to accompany the film’s release, “*Il me semble en avoir donné dans mon ouvrage suffisamment les prevues et j’en reste, pour mon compte, entièrement persuadé,*” [It seems to have given my work sufficient credibility and, I remain, for my part, entirely persuaded], a rather coy pronouncement giving little indication of how he perceived Chaney’s performance (quoted in Shah “No Ordinary Skeleton” 4). When sound came to the movies, the film was re-released with voices added in (Mary Philbin’s and Norman Kerry’s), while the Phantom remained silent (due at least in part to Chaney’s untimely death of throat cancer in 1930).

## **Strategy II: A pre-eminent voice, a sensual exterior Andrew Lloyd Webber musical 1986-**

Multiple filmic adaptations followed in the wake of the 1925 version, all interesting in their approaches, but by far the most influential target text was the 1986 musical written by Andrew Lloyd Webber, with lyrics by Richard Stilgoe and Charles Hart, directed by Hal Prince, originally starring Michael Crawford and Sarah Brightman. Isabelle Husson-Casta suggests that *POTO* is best achieved in the dark of the theatre or the cinema (5), and the stage musical has proven this to be abundantly clear, now in its 32<sup>nd</sup> year in the West End and remaining the longest running Broadway musical. In a reverse of the 1925 silent film, in which the visual horror of Erik threatened to overpower any notion of his ethereal voice, in the musical, the Phantom has the most eloquent and beautiful voice of any of the male characters. The Phantom in this version, Hall maintains, is “difficult to ignore or dismiss, given this music and these lyrics” (122).

Familiar with the 1984 Ken Hill production<sup>vii</sup>, Lloyd Webber was nevertheless persuaded to write his own score with talented young lyricist Charles Hart. The casting of the Phantom was originally a gamble, but Michael Crawford remains the definitive Phantom vocally because his light,

high tenor most closely resembles “the voice of the man” as described by Leroux. Crawford’s “tender and hypnotic singing voice” (Perry 32) is at its most Leroussian during “The Mirror” and in the graveyard scene; compare “Flattering child, you shall know me / See why in shadows I hide / Look at your face in the mirror / I am there inside!” (Webber/Stilgoe/Hart) with “*La destinée t’enchaîne à moi sans retour,*” the line quoted from Gounod’s *Romeo and Juliet* in the original novel.

Wildgen argues that Erik “wishes to be heard, acknowledged, even more than he wishes to be loved” (163). The Lloyd Webber musical, Hall maintains, “relies on the songs to communicate the reasons behind Christine’s fascination with Erik” (122). However, the Lloyd Webber musical introduces a new element into adaptations of *POTO*; the Phantom *looks* so suave and so sexy Christine and the audience are visually fascinated by him. The Phantom captivates so consummately through both angelic song and sensual appearance—a far cry from the skeletal figure and hands that smelt of death from the novel. Some of this is likely due to designer Maria Björnson’s “complete, thought-through vision” (Lee n.p.). Björnson kept the Phantom in evening clothes but made them sleek and Valentino-esque, complete with the Phantom’s liquid black wig. Christopher Tucker designed the Phantom’s make up and iconic mask, which was made into a half mask to give the audience more facial and eye contact with the actor. This approach to the mask worked in tandem with Crawford’s voice; voice combined with “physical agility” which facilitated expression (Perry 32).

If the musical’s Phantom’s voice could soar and he was divested of the skeletal, repulsive body of Leroux’s Erik, how could he justify the deformity that is key to the character? Lloyd Webber takes credit for introducing the element of the public unmasking as a vehicle for stage rather than the close up that film offers, at the end of the performance of the Phantom’s opera, *Don Juan Triumphant* in the musical number “The Point of No Return.” The Phantom’s facial deformity is shocking but dissimilar to Leroux’s “death’s-head,” designed to be seen from the furthest seat in the theatre. Interestingly, the unmasking scene from the 1925 film is still considered the most emblematic. However, the Lloyd Webber Phantom appears to have gotten the best deal of all, with his gorgeous

voice true to Leroux and his sensual physical movements at least as visually appealing as those of his rival Raoul.

### **Andrew Lloyd Webber again (2004)**

The scale was tipped even further when the film of the musical was made in 2004. When Hall argues that “with the visual and the aural opposed to one another, distortion, chaos, confusion results when the two attempt to become one,” (27) one wonders how far the filmmakers felt they could take their vision of a less-deformed Phantom in order to present an “appealing” anti-hero. The film’s interpretation of the Phantom pushes to extremes the ambiguity of the character from the source text.

A film version of Lloyd Webber’s musical had been discussed as early as 1988, revived during 2004, with Joel Schumacher as the director, insisting on a young, beautiful cast. Indeed, even the Phantom, as played by Gerard Butler, is beautiful. With the setting of the film moved from 1881 to 1870, impinging on historical fact (given that in 1870 Paris was in the middle of the Franco-Prussian War), the costume and character of the Phantom are also moved to High Romanticism, in common with mid-century Victorian Gothic. “The disturbing and demonic villain” (in this case, the Phantom) retains a “darkly attractive, if ambivalent allure as a defiant rebel against the constraints of social mores” (Botting 92). The film Phantom has also become a moral vigilante, killing Buquet not only to protect himself but because the scene-shifter is a lecher. The film Phantom protects innocent *ballets rats*; he is muscular rather than corpse-like; his deformity is smaller and less severe than in the stage musical; his underground lair seethes with High Romanticism; he nearly bests Raoul in a daring sword fight in a graveyard.

“The vocal balance between the Phantom and Raoul was pivotal to the audiences’ understanding of the characters,” Lloyd Webber reflected; “when they see the film they think, ‘I get it, I know why Christine really fancies the Phantom—I know because he’s the right side of danger’” (Lloyd Webber 9). This is a very different rendering of Erik’s assimilation of bourgeois values in Leroux, not to mention Christine’s attraction to “the Voice.” Indeed, the script of the film suggests

that Christine is “mesmerized and hypnotized by this *stunning, sexual* master” (script 86, my emphasis). Although the script refers to the Phantom’s “rotting face” (91) and “horrifying skull” (188), the actual extent of his deformity has been derisively referred to as no worse than a sunburn.

The film version of the stage musical is interesting for the new scenes and music that it adds, which are comparatively few. One scene that was added for the film was “The Fairground,” which is hinted at in the stage musical but was represented scenically in the film. Some time in the 1830s, a young Madame Girya visits a fairground in which she sees freaks and performers, including a child who will become the Phantom, who is caged, beaten, and degraded for tawdry entertainment. Diane Lake discusses “the integral moment” of film adaptation that is so important, “to leave it out of a film [. . .] would be an unthinkable choice” (410). While such a scene as “The Fairground” is nowhere available in the Leroux text, arguably for the 2004 Phantom’s character, it *would* be unthinkable to leave out this scene. Crucially, however, for our notion of sight vs sound in the character of the Phantom, he is *silent* in this scene. He has agency in action—in righteous murder, in fact—but Madame Girya does not feel sympathy with him because of his voice, only because he is mistreated. In arguing for a new approach to “theater film” adaptation, Milan Pribisic suggests that bringing together three media such as film, novel, and stage, “the novel tells the story, while stage and film show and tell” (155). The 2004 film, despite its emphasis on music, seems most concerned with *telling*.

This \$95 million film divided phandom, and critics were ambivalent. Schumacher claims part of his motivation for making the film was to bring it to those who couldn’t afford tickets or the show didn’t play where they lived. This view may have some validity; Alexis Weedon found in a study of paratexts influencing readers and viewers that half surveyed bought a book because of watching the film (121). Hall suggests that Lloyd Webber deliberately created a weak film so the musical could go on playing (126). Fred Botting may have complained that “the new frame [*Francis Ford Coppola’s Bram Stoker’s Dracula* (1993)] turns Gothic horror into a sentimental romance”; similar accusations could be made against the film of the *POTO* musical, lacking much of the “bite” of the original story (178). Nevertheless, it can be argued that the stage musical subsequently took on elements of the

film, particularly in its depiction of the Phantom. For example, the actor chosen to portray the Phantom in the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary spectacular at the Royal Albert Hall in 2011 was Ramin Karimloo. Although he had played both Raoul and the Phantom many times on stage, he had also played the Christine's father in the film<sup>viii</sup> and continued the role of the Phantom in *Love Never Dies* (2010). While a strong vocalist, it could not escape notice that Karimloo's muscular physique and attractiveness channelled more of the film of the musical than the Leroux novel. This has very much proven Bruhn's contention that adaptation "(be it from novel to film or between other media) ought to be regarded as a two-way process instead of a form of one-way transport" (73).

### **Strategy III: Different registers**

#### **Big Finish Classics (2007)**

Several versions of *POTO* react against the notion of undramatizability by interpreting Erik's visual/aural duality literally. If such a man as Erik cannot exist in reality but only in prose fiction, such versions address this head-on and cast one actor for his speaking voice and another for his singing voice. As regards Leroux's interest in sound, it is worth noting that the writer kept up to date with the newest fiction and was evidently interested in science and new technology. It is therefore appropriate that the historical incident that catalyzes the discovery of Erik's bones and "inspires" Leroux to write *POTO* is the 1907 burial of *les voix vivantes*, a collection of phonographic recordings in the Opéra's cellars during an "eerily funereal" ceremony (Shah "No Ordinary Skeleton" 2). The "living voices" competing with a dead body corresponds to the way sound recording was approached at the end of the nineteenth century. Jonathan Sterne and Mitchell Akiyama question the desire for the "sonification" of ever-older recordings, especially when such desires manifest in the creation of a digital sound file in 2008 for "the world's oldest recording," a phonoautogram from 1860, which was nevertheless never intended to be played back—the phonoautogram was intended as a device to make the aural visual (555). Despite the many ways *POTO* is rooted in the past (the 1880s), the voices

appeal to contemporary technology (1909) to “haunt” the present. Barnaby Edwards’ audio drama production is haunted by all previous adaptations to the point that he stresses its closeness in spirit and detail to the 1910 source text.

As argued above, audio drama is a strong contender for realizing the unperformable performable not only in *POTO* but in Gothic due to its inherent conduit directly into the mind, imagery, and emotion. “A close look at the history and development of radio drama and radio drama adaptation provides a focus for a discussion about the subject on a metalevel,” though very little work on this has been done (Huwiler 137-8). Oddly, unlike other contemporary genre fiction, *POTO* has resisted being adapted for audio. Its audio adaptations are few, including a 1943 *Lux Radio Theatre* dramatization of the film starring Claude Rains and a *CBS Radio Mystery Theatre* (1975) adaptation starring Gordon Gould and adapted by Himan Brown. The novel, with its rich auditory soundtrack, characters who frequently burst into song or hear things long before they ever see them, would seem like a natural choice for audio adaptation. In 2007, successful audio drama CD subscription service, Big Finish Productions, produced its *POTO*. The adaptation uses the musical sound-map described in Leroux’s prose to a literal extent that is unknown in all other adaptations. As Hall points out, Leroux’s original readership would have had a running soundtrack of the operas as they read the book (18), including pieces by Gounod, Reyer, Saint-Saëns, Massenet, Guiraud, and Delibes. “How carefully composed Leroux’s own soundtrack is” (Newark 69). Newark further notes that in the novel, the sung words of the featured operas are woven into the plot (68).

Perhaps it is in fact the disjunction between sight and sound, this “double vision,” that has intimidated would-be audio dramatists with *POTO*. Richard J. Hand suggests that “by the twenty-first century, some people have learnt to be listeners,” that is, despite the ubiquity of visual forms, an aural story can still be told well (197). The potentially interactive audio drama of the twenty-first century “demanded a new level of required skills: to listen and physically engage, to take control and even some responsibility in shaping the unfurling narrative” (Hand 197). While we accept that *POTO* is a ghost story with the machinery of the Gothic being revealed as completely human in origin, still, for the ghostly suspense to work, it links with the sound tropes of the Gothic: voices are heard but their

origins are not seen. Nevertheless, *POTO* lacks many of the auditory cues we expect from horror: no howling dogs or seaside storms, for example. It is evident how traditional and contemporary theatre and screen culture has assimilated the visual with the auditory for practical, technical, and aesthetic reasons, but sound is a highly significant component in horror fiction (Hand 14). Edwards may well be adhering to the quality Constantidinides cites here, that although “Dracula and Frankenstein’s origins are literary, their continuous journeys through the diverse landscape of cinema have detached them from their creators’ written portraits, thus demythologizing their authorship and filmic presence” (91). It is, in fact, potentially a failing of the Big Finish adaptation that it adheres *too* closely to the source text. Even Leroux changed lyrics or opera facts to fit his narrative, as Newark points out (72). Hajnal has noted that the late nineteenth century novelistic obsession with ekphrasis has been difficult to bring across in filmic adaptations. While ekphrasis has generally been a visual process, it has been noted in musical composition (for example, Mussorsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition*). However, there does not seem to be a term for a piece of aural drama in which one medium of art (the aural drama) tries to relate to another medium (in this case, the musical compositions described and adapted by Leroux in the 1910 novel) by defining and describing its essence and form. Perhaps this is an explanation for Newark’s “resistance” to adaptation?

The Big Finish adaptation features an accomplished cast. Peter Guinness provides Erik’s speaking voice, and Matthew Hargreaves his singing voice. This adaptation is notable for allowing Erik to sing the full range of music given to him in the novel, from *Faust* to *Otello* (and while he plays *Don Juan Triumphant* on the pipe organ, he never sings it). Guinness makes Erik “a child of the night” (Husson-Casta 5), gravelly and sinister, and distinctive, though his tone hardly suggests soft and gentle. Furthermore, Hargreaves’ operatic voice, while encompassing and rich, does not reproduce the whispery, sweet quality of Erik’s singing voice in the novel.

Guinness’ casting and indeed his performance stems from the way character is created in audio drama. Although we are able to recognize and remember visually up to 10,000 faces, we do not seem to have the same ability to voices unlinked with faces (Beck 97). Nevertheless, “the ear is

tremendously sensitive to distortion and levels of semantic implication” (Truax 34). Beck suggests that the audio drama actor must work much more quickly in establishing character:

Your first lines tell the listener of your character’s dialect [. . .] and identity. This information could be later adjusted or confirmed, but you have to be sure of these signals when recording because you stick by them. The difference with radio is that the revealing of character must be gradual and progressive, whatever the signalling you do with your first lines. Stage and screen give a complete display of body, costume, and face (111).

Indeed, the characters in the Big Finish adaptation must *tell* us what Erik looks like; we must take their word that he is hideous, for we have no way of seeing it ourselves. For example, Madame Giry helps us see,

“Horror, horror!” Those were Christine’s words upon glimpsing the face of the Opera Ghost. And who can blame her? Picture it: a living skull with four black holes where the eyes, nose, and mouth should be. [. . .] The face of Death.

The only other way to convey Erik’s hideousness or perhaps his sinister qualities is through the timbre of his voice, which Guinness accomplishes to good effect.

The “Resurrection of Lazarus” scene from the graveyard in Perros-Guirec where Christine (and a lurking Raoul) hear the violin playing seemingly out of a pile of bones is another representative example. Is it Christine’s father’s ghost playing? Is it Erik? How can we see? How can we tell? The corporeal quality of characters in audio drama who do not speak has always represented an epistemological challenge. Husson-Casta would argue that Erik’s voice “subsumes his body” (32). His voice “continues to grow in silence, in the secret place of our own musical imagination” (34). Indeed, director Barnaby Edwards chooses to represent this theme from Raoul’s point of view in the manner of a serial cliffhanger. We understand only the rudiments of Erik’s form as he ceases to be the Angel of Music or the spirit of Christine’s father and only “see” him when Raoul does.

RAOUL: Christine, whoever this angel is, he is not your father! Your father lies buried beneath this tomb and there he will remain until Judgement Day.

CHRISTINE: How- how could you, Raoul? You’ve destroyed everything!

*She runs away sobbing.*



RAOUL: Christine! Christine!

*SFX: Footsteps*

RAOUL: Who's there? Show yourself.

ERIK: You wish to look upon me?

RAOUL: Step forward into the moonlight if you would.

*SFX: Footsteps*

RAOUL: I take it I have the pleasure of addressing the Angel of Music? Will you not take off your mask, Monsieur?

ERIK: Very well.

*SFX: Cracking noises*

ERIK: Very well. Behold: the face of Death!

*SFX: The non-diegetic music builds to a crescendo*

RAOUL: No! No! Noooooooooooooo! (Edwards)

In the influential *In/Fidelity* collection from 2008, Thomas Leitch wrote, Adultery is good; it's productive. I mean it's not good for the family, but it's great for the novelist. It can open up all these productive, newfound possibilities for writing fiction that we never had before. So instead of saying fidelity is good, infidelity is bad, why don't we say fidelity is maybe not so good and infidelity is better (quoted in Hazette 45).

Edwards' interest in dramatizing *POTO* in aural form was in order to include the music described in the source text and, perhaps, to interrogate the ambiguity of its three main characters (and, by including the Daroga in the adaptation, a character frequently left out, Edwards makes obvious the very absence of the character in previous target texts). Indeed, absences and presences "haunt" the Big Finish adaptation: it retains a narrator, Madame Giry, but dispenses with the mysterious omniscience of the novel's narrator and framing device from the "editor," Gaston Leroux. The characters of Raoul and Christine retain shading that is consistent with their ambiguous portrayal in the novel, with Raoul portrayed by James D'Arcy, a young, handsome actor with a low-pitched, commanding voice who has played both villains and heroes, and who blends Raoul's petulance with bravery and sincerity. Helen Goldwyn's Christine retains a bittersweet innocence while remaining independent from either Raoul's or Erik's demands.

As noted earlier, one strategy the 2004 *POTO* film undertakes to create a sympathetic edge to the Phantom is through the "Fairground" flashback. While Peter Guinness' vocal tone often gives his aural Erik empathy-inducing pathos, this Phantom is always kept at arm's length from the audience. While this is consistent with the source text's approach, in light of Bruhn's assertion that the target text changes the source text through changes in readers' perceptions, the audio drama adaptation has the scope for medium-specific intimacy which is not fulfilled in the Big Finish adaptation. Radio drama and latterly audio drama can and should take full advantage of what Kip Allen calls "fostering the illusion of intimacy." Audio drama possesses a conduit directly into the mind, imagery, and emotion<sup>ix</sup>. While quite literally, Erik's singing voice (as performed by Matthew Hargreaves) is beautiful, this aural target text never seems to bring our ear to Erik's soul.

## **Conclusion**

Husson-Casta represents the centrality of sound in *Phantom of the Opera* and its appeal: "*Le style leroussien (en)chante*" (34). The "double vision" (or an engagement with two senses that do not always harmonize) as suggested by Hall is linked with Leroux's career-long interest in justice; as a writer, Leroux was insistent on never letting ourselves being seduced by mere appearances (Lamy

75). The durability of the story as demonstrated by its plethora of audio-visual adaptations seems to suggest this is a popular message, personified, literally, in the person of Erik, whose hideous face and body is held up against his beautiful, otherworldly voice. To this end, some would argue that *POTO* can never be satisfactorily dramatized; there is no human alive who can give us Erik's sinister, commanding speaking voice, physique that is both athletic and skeletal, and a singing voice that could convince us it comes directly from Heaven. It is true, too, that prose cannot achieve the different timbres of sound that the voices have that Leroux describes. *Don Juan Triumphant*, argues Newark, "tempts but exceeds dramatic representation" (75).

I would argue, then, that the most satisfying target text of *Phantom of the Opera* will continue to be the Lloyd Webber stage musical, which embraces the faux-Gothic machinery in its theatricality, allows Erik to be both visually ugly and attractive at the same time while giving in to the supremacy of his voice, seducing everyone with his lyrics, music, and vocals. Paradoxically, by stressing the Phantom's visual appeal almost over and above his sonic musicality, the 2004 film reverses the appeal of not only the character, but the story itself. To an extent, the 2004 film *Phantom* loses his poignancy when he loses the severity of his deformity. He may seduce, but he risks losing the inherent quality of his "nature" that has given the character such longevity.

Raj Shah suggests that *Phantom of the Opera* is "now poised on the brink of cultural ascendancy" even as it moves further from its source text ("No Ordinary Skeleton" 2). Wolf also argues for understanding *POTO* as "a multidimensional allegory" (Wolf 4). This chimes with Hazette's definition of adaptation which includes archetypes, dynamic change, translation, and transmission. *POTO* has survived where its many Gothic contemporaries have faded from the picture due to the strength and malleability of its main characters and its insistence of the play-within-the-play which creates a never-ending fun-house mirror of interpretations. In target texts as diverse as silent film, stage musical, and audio drama, *POTO* demonstrates very well that the source text can indeed be "re-written" in relation to its target texts without diminishing either.

## Works Cited

- Alfu. *Gaston Leroux: Parcours d'une oeuvre*. Amiens: Encrage, 1996.
- Allen, Kip. Personal interview. 29 April 2013.
- Anderson, Robert G. *Faces, Forms, Films: The Artistry of Lon Chaney*. New York: A. S. Barnes and Company, 1971.
- Babilas, Dorota. "Tod Browning's *Dracula* (1931): The Vampire Wears a Dress Coat." *Dracula and the Gothic in Literature, Pop Culture, and the Arts*, edited by Isabel Ermida. Leiden: Rodopi, 2015, pp. 137-56.
- Beck, Alan. *Radio Acting*. London: A & C Black, 1997.
- Behind the Mask: The Story of The Phantom of the Opera*. Directed by James Crichton, Really Useful Films, 2004.
- Bell, Will. Introduction to *Dramatic Notes: Foregrounding Music in the Dramatic Experience*. Luton: University of Luton Press, 1998.
- Blyn, Robin. *The Freak-Garde: Extraordinary Bodies and Revolutionary Art in America*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013.
- Botting, Fred. *Gothic*. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Brown, Julie. "Carnival of Souls and the Organs of Horror." *Music in the Horror Film: Listening to Fear*, edited by Neil Lerner. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010, pp.1-20.
- Constandinides, Costas. *From Film Adaptation to Post-Celluloid Adaptation*. New York: Continuum, 2010.
- Faubion, Renée. "Notes on Phantom of the Opera." Personal correspondence, 2006.
- Hall, Ann C. *Phantom Variations: The Adaptation of Gaston Leroux's Phantom of the Opera, 1925 to the Present*. Jefferson NC: McFarland, 2009.
- Hand, Richard J. *Listen in Terror: British Horror Radio from the Advent of Broadcasting to the Digital Age*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014.
- Hazette, Valérie V. *Wuthering Heights on Film and Television: A Journey Across Time and Cultures*. Bristol: Intellect, 2015.

Husson-Casta, Isabelle. *Le Travail de l'«obscure clarté» dans le Fantôme de l'Opéra de Gaston Leroux*. Paris: Lettres-Modernes, 1997.

Huwiler, Elke. "Engaging the Ear: Teaching Radio Drama Adaptations." *Redefining Adaptation Studies*, edited by Dennis Cutchins, Laurence Raw, and James M. Welsh. Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2010, pp. 133-46.

Ingværsson, Jonas. "Literature Through Radio: Distance and Silence in *The War of the Worlds*, 1938/1898." *Adaptation Studies: New Challenges, New Directions*, edited by Jorgen Bruhn, Anne Gjelsvik, and Eirik Frisvold Hanssen. London: Bloomsbury, 2013, pp.265-286.

Király, Hajnal. "The Medium Strikes Back- 'Impossible Adaptation' Revisited." *Adaptation Studies: New Challenges, New Directions*, edited by Jorgen Bruhn, Anne Gjelsvik, and Eirik Frisvold Hanssen. London: Bloomsbury, 2013, pp.179-202

Lake, Diane. "Adapting the Unadaptable—The Screenwriter's Perspective." *A Companion to Literature, Film, and Adaptation*, edited by Deborah Cartmell. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012, pp.408-15.

Lamy, Jean-Claude, and Pierre Lépine. *Gaston Leroux ou Le Vrai Rouletabille*. Paris: Éditions du Rocher, 2003.

Lee, Michael. "Maria Björnson." *The Phantom of the Opera at the Royal Albert Hall Souvenir Programme Highlights*, 2011.

Leitch, Thomas. "Adaptation and Intertextuality, or, What isn't an Adaptation, and What Does it Matter?" *A Companion to Literature, Film, and Adaptation*, edited by Deborah Cartmell. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012, pp. 87-104.

Leroux, Gaston. *Le Fantôme de l'Opéra*. Paris: Livre du Poche, 2004.

\_\_\_\_\_. Trans. Lowell Bair. *The Phantom of the Opera*. New York: Bantam Classics, 1990.

Lippert, Bianca. "Betty and Lisa: Alternating Between Sameness and Uniqueness." *TV's Betty Goes Global: From Telenovela to International Brand*. Ed. Janet McCabe and Kim Akass. London: IB Tauris, 2013, pp.83-98.

*Lon Chaney: A Thousand Faces*. Directed by Kevin Brownlow, narrated by Kenneth Branagh. Turner Classic Movies, 2000.

Mackintosh, Cameron. "The Phantom's Trail." 2015. *The Phantom of the Opera Souvenir Booklet* 2016.

McCabe, Janet, and Kim Akass. Introduction to *TV's Betty Goes Global: From Telenovela to International Brand*. London: IB Tauris, 2013.

Murphy, Terence Patrick. *The Fairytale Plot and Structure*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Newark, Cormac. "'Vous Qui Faites l'Endormie': The Phantom and the Buried Voices of the Paris Opéra." *19<sup>th</sup> Century Music*, vol. 33, no.1, 2009, pp.62-77.

Pednaud, J Tithonus. "John Coffey: The Living Skeleton Dude." *The Human Marvels*, 2012, <http://www.thehumanmarvels.com/john-coffey-the-living-skeleton-dude/>, accessed 18 December 2016.

Perry, George. In *Andrew Lloyd Webber's The Phantom of the Opera Companion*. London: Pavilion Books, 2004, pp.25-45.

*The Penalty*. Directed by Wallace Worsley. Performances by Lon Chaney, Claire Adams, Ethel Grey Terry. Goldwyn Pictures, 1920.

*The Phantom of the Opera*. Directed by Rupert Julian. Performances by Lon Chaney, Mary Philbin, Norman Kerry. Universal, 1925.

*The Phantom of the Opera*. Music by Andrew Lloyd Webber, lyrics by Charles Hart, Richard Stilgoe. The Really Useful Group, 1986.

*The Phantom of the Opera*. Directed by Joel Schumacher. Performances by Gerard Butler, Emmy Rossum, Patrick Wilson. Warner Brothers, 2004.

*The Phantom of the Opera*. Directed by Barnaby Edwards. Performances by Peter Guinness, Helen Goldwyn, Anna Massey, James D'Arcy. Big Finish, 2007.

Praver, S.S. *Caligari's Children: The Film as Tale of Terror*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980.

Pribisic, Milan. "The Pleasures of 'Theater Film': Stage to Film Adaptation." *Redefining Adaptation Studies*, edited by Dennis Cutchins, Laurence Raw, and James M. Welsh. Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2010, pp. 147-59.

Şahin, Sevgi and Laurence Raw. "Toward a Pedagogy for Adaptation Studies." *Redefining Adaptation Studies*, edited by Dennis Cutchins, Laurence Raw, and James M. Welsh. Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2010, pp.71-84.

Shah, Raj. "No Ordinary Skeleton: Unmasking the Secret Source of Gaston Leroux's *Le Fantome de l'Opéra*." *Forum of Modern Language Studies*, vol. 0, no. 0, 2013, pp.1-14.

\_\_\_\_\_. "The Publication and Initial French Reception of Gaston Leroux's *Le Fantôme de l'Opéra*." *French Studies Bulletin*, vol. 138, no. 1, 2016, pp.13-16.

Skal, David J. *The Monster Show: A Cultural History of Horror*. London: Plexus, 1993.

Sterne, Jonathan, and Mitchell Akiyama. "The Recording that Never Wanted to Be Heard and Other Stories of Sonification." *The Oxford Handbook of Sound Studies*, edited by Trevor Pinch, Karin Bijsterveld. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, pp.554-60.

Truax, Barry. *Acoustic Communications*, 2nd ed. Westport, CT: Ablex Publishing, 2001.

*The Unholy Three*. Directed by Jack Conway. Performances by Lon Chaney, Harry Earles, Lila Lee, Elliott Nugent. MGM, 1930.

Van Elferen, Isabella. "Sonic Gothic." *The Gothic World*, edited by Glennie Byron and Dale Townshend. London: Routledge, 2014, pp. 429-40.

Webber, Andrew Lloyd. In *Andrew Lloyd Webber's The Phantom of the Opera Companion*. London: Pavilion Books, 2004, pp.8-9.

Weedon, Alexis. "The Numbers Game: Quantifying the Audience." *Redefining Adaptation Studies*, edited by Dennis Cutchins, Laurence Raw, and James M. Welsh. Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2010, pp.111-32.

Wildgen, K.E. "Making the Shadow Conscious: The Enduring Legacy of Gaston Leroux." *Symposium* vol. 55, no. 3, 2001, pp.155-167.

Wolf, Leonard. "Introduction." *The Essential Phantom of the Opera: the Definitive, Annotated Edition of Gaston Leroux's Classic Novel*. Gaston Leroux, edited by and translated by Leonard Wolf. New York: Plume, 1996, pp.1-18.

---

<sup>i</sup> The novel was written in 1908 and published, following its serialisation in *Le Gaulois*, in volume form in March 1910.

<sup>ii</sup> The first known adaptation was in 1916, *Das Phantom der Oper* (Matray).

<sup>iii</sup> Quotations from Leroux are my translations.

<sup>iv</sup> As Cormac Newark points out, the 1916 German adaptation is lost.

<sup>v</sup> His voice "was deep and virile, quite appropriate to his personality, and it was flexible" according to Anderson (95).

<sup>vi</sup> It has been accepted for about a decade that there is no such thing as a silent film; "from ambient noise to programme music, the moving image has always been accompanied by sound" (Bell vii).

<sup>vii</sup> Ken Hill, an accomplished British popular stage producer, debuted his stage musical of *POTO* in 1976. It was revived in 1984 and went on tour in the UK and US.

<sup>viii</sup> The script notes, "Fixed to the plaque is a daguerreotype of her [Christine's] FATHER. There is a sculpted violin in front. (NB. Her FATHER should very vaguely resemble the PHANTOM when disguised.)" (78)

<sup>ix</sup> Accumulated literature confirms that audio dramatization causes listeners to generate many and vivid images. Cf. McMurtry, "Imagination and Narrative, Young People's Experiences," *The Journal of Audio and Radio Media*, 2017.