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超越通俗劇：舒馬克的歌劇魅影（2004）

Transcending Melodrama:

Joel Schumacher's *The Phantom of the Opera* (2004)

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TRANSCENDING MELODRAMA:  
JOEL SCHUMACHER'S  
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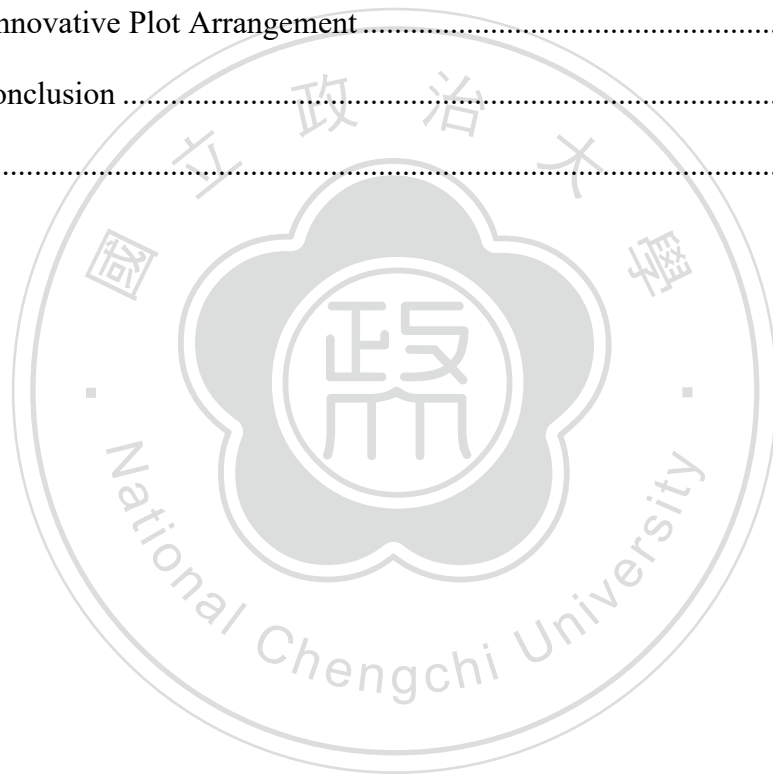
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國立政治大學英國語文學系碩士班

碩士論文提要

論文名稱：超越通俗劇：舒馬克的《歌劇魅影》（2004）

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論文提要內容：

改編自安德魯·洛伊·韋伯1986年的同名音樂劇，靈感同時來自卡斯頓·勒胡於1910年所出版的法國小說《歌劇魅影》——2004年舒馬克執導的電影改編版《歌劇魅影》將觀眾帶入了通俗劇的世界。通俗劇因使用了固定的人物形象和公式化的情節安排而一直被學者蔑視並被視為低級文化。然而，學者忽視了通俗劇在改寫傳統和公式方面的靈活性和適應性。本論文以《歌劇魅影》（2004）為通俗劇範例，探討編劇安德魯·洛伊·韋伯和喬伊·舒馬克如何利用通俗劇元素並同時顛覆它們，繼而超越通俗劇的限制。從角色塑造和情節安排方面來說，本論文主張這部電影比傳統的通俗劇更加複雜和多維，成為了現代通俗劇發展的一個例證。

關鍵字：《歌劇魅影》、喬伊·舒馬克、安德魯·洛伊·韋伯、通俗劇

## ABSTRACT

Based on Andrew Lloyd Webber's 1986 musical of the same title, which in turn is inspired by the 1910 French novel *Le Fantôme de l'Opéra* by Gaston Leroux, the 2004 film adaptation of *The Phantom of the Opera*, directed by Joel Schumacher, brings the audience to the world of melodrama. Melodrama has long been despised and regarded as low culture by scholars, due to its use of stock characterization and formulaic plot arrangement. However, the scholars overlook the flexibility and adaptability of modern melodrama in rewriting the traditions and formulas. This thesis, focusing on *The Phantom of the Opera* (2004) as a melodrama, explores how the screenwriters, Andrew Lloyd Webber and Joel Schumacher, utilize the melodramatic elements and subvert them at the same time, transcending the limitations of melodramas. I argue that, different from the traditional melodramas, the 2004 film adaptation of *The Phantom of the Opera* justifies how this modern melodrama proves itself as a valuable and respectable literary artwork, due to its portrayal of the complexity of human nature and melodramatic but innovative plot rewrite. In this film, the screenwriters utilize the melodramatic elements and subvert them at the same time, so as to go beyond the limitations of melodramas.

*Keywords:* *The Phantom of the Opera*, Joel Schumacher, Andrew Lloyd Webber, melodrama

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### About Melodrama

William Gillette, a playwright and an actor in melodrama, was once quoted as saying, “no one that I ever met or heard of has appeared to know what melodrama really is” (qtd. in Rahill 13). Indeed, the impressions of melodrama are constantly changing over time. People despised it as a low culture initially; but after years, scholars soon realize the literary and cultural value inside that is worth discussing and investigating. According to C. Hugh Holman, the word ‘melodrama’ literally can be defined as “a play with music”; it can also be further defined as “a play based on a romantic plot and developed sensationally with little regard for convincing motivation and with an excessive appeal to the emotion” (312). From the glossary edited by M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Harpham, its definition of melodrama also brings up its ability on provoking the audience’s emotions with “implausible events and sensational action” (212). The setting, actions, and lines designed in the play aim at arousing the audience’s strong feelings, such as pathos and joy, so as to thrill them. In order to achieve such a purpose, melodrama develops its own formula, in terms of both character and plot.

Melodrama often employs stock characters such as a hero, a heroine, a villain, and a fool, as suggested by Monique Rooney (88). There are some general traits of these characters. A hero in melodrama is usually handsome, brave, and moral. He follows the rules of society; he is willing to do everything righteous to protect the presence of virtues in the play. A heroine is both beautiful and innocent; she is also moral and courageous. Yet, she is vulnerable and in need of the hero’s rescue when she is imprisoned and silenced by evil. As for the evil villain, he often has unpleasant appearances and his personality is rather corrupted and vengeful. The fool can be a villain’s accomplice, a servant, or a maidservant. A villain’s

accomplice is typically idiotic and serves as the comic relief in a play. The servant of the hero is faithful, and he is responsible to collect information that is beneficial for defeating the villain. Likewise, he can also serve as comic relief, regardless of whether he is as idiotic as the villain's accomplice. Lastly, the heroine will also have a maidservant, who is loyal and humorous to entertain both her mistress and the audience.

In terms of plot, melodrama always acts as a moral tale, in which the characters are either extremely good or bad, and are either rewarded or punished according to what they have done. As Frank Rahill summarizes, "primarily concerned with situation and plot, [melodrama] calls upon mimed action ... and employs a ... fixed complement of stock characters ... concluding its fable happily with virtue rewarded after many trials and vice punished" (xiv). Such moral polarization is described as a "manichaeistic struggle of good and evil" (Brooks ix), which is rife with "pure and polar concepts of darkness and light, salvation and damnation" (Brooks 12). Peter Brooks also sees melodrama arose in a "post-sacred" world where traditional imperatives of truth and morality have been violently questioned and yet there were still urge for "the promulgation of truth and ethics" (15). He wants to stress the importance of hidden moral legibility in melodrama, as he believes that melodrama is somehow responsible for expressing the "moral occult" (Brooks 5). According to Brooks, a moral occult is "the domain of operative spiritual values which is both indicated within and masked by the surface of reality" (5). Therefore, in order to render the morals to the audience, melodramas generally simplify complicated concepts and themes, like good and evil, in reducing them into binary opposition, showing that there is no middle point between them. In a melodrama, the protagonistic existence of virtue and innocence is emphasized throughout the whole play, starting from the very beginning of the play, and then it is in danger of being dimmed by an antagonistic evil force that attempts to silence and bury it. The



happy ending of melodrama always illustrates the victory of virtues over vices, securing the existence of virtues, rather than gaining them. As Peter Brooks claims, melodrama becomes “the principal mode for uncovering, demonstrating, and making operative the essential moral universe in a post-sacred era” (15). With this kind of clear-cut endings, the audience can “enjoy triumph [of the good] without considering its cost to others, despair without seeking alternative courses, and protest without questioning the bases of our own superior moral integrity” (Smith 10). Same as the endings, the emotional pleasure that the audience can gain is clear-cut and extreme. The audience can enjoy the pleasure to its essence without any complexity.

However, melodrama was generally despised by scholars in the past. It was often being dismissed due to its use of stock characterization, implausible events, and predictable ending, without any rich complexities and broader moral dimensions. The scholars believed that even though it has its own historical value, it does not guarantee intrinsic merit within (Smith 51). They also accused melodrama with the following accusations: “Melodrama falsifies life, its characters are puppets, its action absurd, its scenic marvels mere theatrical effects, its language grotesque and exaggerated, its poetic justice naïve and its escapism infantile” (qtd. in Smith 51). Scholars found the extreme simplicity and unreasonable coincidence in melodramas were unacceptable for a literary genre. Therefore, melodrama was regarded as low culture, because of all its conventions and formulas in characterization and plot.

### **Reasons for Choosing *The Phantom of the Opera* and the 2004 Film Adaptation**

To further explore the field of melodrama, I chose the 2004 film adaptation of *The Phantom of the Opera* as my focus in the thesis. The film is a part of my childhood. It was released when I was 9 years old and my father bought it right away after the DVD was available. My sisters and I got ourselves immersed in the breathtaking music, attractive

visuals, and enchanting love triangle in this, somehow tragic, film. It has occupied a special place in my heart since then. When I grow up, I perceive more about the background of the film, including the original opera and novel version. The more films and operas I have watched, the more curious I become: with so many other romantic stories in the market, what is so special about *The Phantom of the Opera* that allows it to be such a huge success?<sup>1</sup> Especially when it is generally categorized as a melodrama, in which melodrama is regarded as a low culture. Moreover, its arrangement of plot and characters are not flawless. But its success is undeniable.

It is possible that melodramas receive more positive criticism and analysis nowadays than in the past. There are analyses focusing on different perspectives of the original opera and novel, but only a few scrutinize the 2004 film adaptation, let alone study its form as melodrama. Therefore, I would like to investigate the film from the perspective of melodrama, to pursue the possibilities of making this low culture worthier for scholarly study. I believe that it will be shortsighted if people limit the possibilities of one work due to its genre. The long history of the literature reveals the potential of one literature category by allowing its refinement and evolution. *The Phantom of the Opera*, as a melodrama, also suggests its flexibility and adaptability, as when the time and the culture change, it can still fulfill its role as a tool for teaching morals and reflect the culture nowadays, with improving characterization and plot. It also changes according to the needs of the commercial market, in which the audience requires more complexity on the character development and the appearance of empowered females, etc. As suggested by James L. Smith, the dream world of

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<sup>1</sup> According to the official website of *The Phantom of the Opera* (Musical), “*The Phantom of the Opera* is widely considered one of the most beautiful and spectacular productions in history, playing to over 160 million people in 41 countries and 186 cities in 18 languages”. According to the website named Forbes, it is also the longest running show in Broadway history and the third longest-running West End show. See <https://www.thephantomoftheopera.com/> and <https://www.forbes.com/sites/conormurray/2023/04/17/phantom-of-the-opera-left-broadway-as-longest-running-musical-heres-the-entire-top-10/>

melodrama in fact “gives us the courage and confidence to go on living” by dramatizing our fear (54-55). It becomes more significant in both entertaining and spiritual aspects. In this case, through the research of this film, I would like to provide another piece of evidence to shed light on the development of modern melodrama by focusing on *The Phantom of the Opera*. In other words, I would like to explore how such modern melodrama as *The Phantom of the Opera* is different from the traditional melodramas.

### **The Summary of The Phantom of the Opera (2004)**

Based on Andrew Lloyd Webber's 1986 musical of the same title<sup>2</sup>, which in turn is inspired by the 1910 French novel *Le Fantôme de l'Opéra* by Gaston Leroux, the plot of *The Phantom of the Opera* (2004)<sup>3</sup> tells a story of a pitiful creature, the Phantom. It is a story that centers around the love triangle between a soprano named Christine Daaé, her childhood sweetheart Raoul de Chagny, and the Phantom in the Opera House. Christine came to the opera house with her father when she was a child. After her father's death, the Phantom disguised himself as the Angel of Music, becoming her coach and teaching her to sing.

The main story begins in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Paris. During the rehearsal of the opera *Hannibal*, the manager Monsieur Lefèvre announces his retirement and passes the ownership of the opera house to the new managers Richard Firmin and Gilles André. The new managers then introduce their patron, the young Raoul. Christine, who is one of the dancers, recognizes Raoul at once but he fails to see her at that moment. Later, the leading soprano Carlotta Giudicelli refuses to perform due to the long-term torment by the Phantom. Facing the cancellation of the performance, Madame Girya, the ballet mistress, recommends Christine as the replacement for the leading actress. Having no choice, Firmin and André accept her

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<sup>2</sup> The musical's libretto is written by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Richard Stilgoe.

<sup>3</sup> The film's screenplay is written by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Joel Schumacher.

suggestion, which turns out to be a great success with Christine's singing skills. Raoul reunites with Christine after her performance, reminiscing their childhood memories. That night, when Christine is ready to leave her dressing room to have supper with Raoul, the Phantom appears behind the mirror, spiriting her to his underground lair. There, Christine reveals the Phantom's deformity by removing his mask out of curiosity. The Phantom reacts violently, but still sends her back to the opera house unharmed, and demands the managers that Christine needs to be the leading actress in the coming performance. The managers ignore him, and the Phantom avenges them by poisoning Carlotta and killing the stagehand Joseph Buquet. Scared by the violence caused by the Phantom, Christine takes Raoul to the rooftop, and they confess their love to each other. The Phantom witnesses their confession and swears there will be a war upon them. Near the end of the story, Christine and Raoul confront the Phantom together. Christine persuades the Phantom with her kindness by kissing him. The Phantom releases both Christine and Raoul eventually and disappears.

## **Literature Review**

### The Original Novel and Its Musical Adaptation

Despite being called "one of the great novels about the nineteenth century," the original novel *Le Fantôme de l'Opéra* received a rather inaccurate and controversial initial reception (Walter 51). Raj Shah clarifies this mystery by suggesting that the claims stating that the novel "was almost totally ignored by the reviewers when it was published" and that "its sales were certainly disappointing" do not have solid evidence to support them (14). In fact, the sales of the novel were very healthy, and the reviews of the novel were positive (Shah 14). Those claims are just misleading misconceptions that are widespread nowadays. The musical also receives an undeniable great success. Michael Feingold indicates that "[t]he semi-educated middle-class world loves Andrew Lloyd Webber best of all theater composers,

and the *Phantom* is already a financial triumph, no matter what any critic may say, with an \$18 million advance sale” (qtd. in Winkler 274-275), which further exemplifies the commercial success of the musical.

Given the novel’s positive reception and the musical’s huge success, it is certain that critics and scholars—such as Jessica Sternfeld and Changnam Lee—will have done formal or academic research on them. Among the secondary criticisms of the novel and the musical, there is one shared focus: the characterization of the Phantom. In the novel, the Phantom was born with a disfigured face. Although the reason for his deformity changes in some of the later film adaptations, like having acid poured onto his face, the Phantom in the musical follows the one used in the novel: the deformity as a birth defect. Therefore, the two Phantoms share similar traits in both the novel and the musical. Lloyd Webber’s Phantom, like Leroux’s, is a genius—he is a magician, architect, and composer. He is also cruel, angry, irritable, and always goes to extremes. He fails to integrate into the society, and the society does not accept him. Consequently, he learns to threaten or even kill people to achieve his purposes and gain what he longs for. Jessica Sternfeld applies the idea of Obsessive Avenger proposed by Martin Norden to Lloyd Webber’s Phantom: “an egomaniacal sort, almost always an adult male, who does not rest until he has had his revenge on those he holds responsible for his disablement and/or violating his moral code in some other way” (qtd. in Sternfeld 797). She then points out the consequences that the Phantom terrorizes the community and kills two secondary characters that doubt or defy him, as he believes these people are of those culprits who cause his tragic past (Sternfeld 797).

On the other hand, Changnam Lee evaluates Leroux’s Phantom from a sociological perspective: The Phantom appears as “an asocial figure because of his ugliness concealed by the mask” (8). He elaborates on the Phantom’s rare appearance among urban crowds, in

which his only appearance in the crowd is in the masquerade (Lee 8). The masquerade can be viewed as a variation of urban crowds here. Lee then brings forth the reason why the removal of the mask renders the Phantom dangerous in the story. He suggests that the Phantom “cannot connect without the mask in the society but with the mask, he can still remain within the society, unidentified and preserve his authenticity” (Lee 8). Furthermore, being isolated from society, the Phantom is incapable of returning to ordinary life by marrying Christine. Lee identifies his deformity as the main reason for his incapability, in which “his appearance may not be understood as only a representation of an individual character, but as a distorted social body and alien prohibited from transgressing the social borders ... that is internalized in the cellar of the opera house, reflecting the fears and desires of the bourgeois middle class” (9). In such instance, Lee maintains that due to the Phantom’s ugly appearance, society does not leave enough choices for the Phantom to choose for his future life, regardless of his desire and longing (9).

#### The 2004 Film Adaptation

As for the 2004 film adaptation, there are fewer secondary criticisms that can be found than those of the original novel and musical. Perhaps there is too much research done on the previous film versions already, especially the most famous 1925 version, in which the Phantom is played by Lon Chaney. The plot of the 2004 film does not have huge differences from that of the musical, as Lloyd Webber is involved in both productions (H.; Hiles). Nonetheless, some critics continue to focus on the characterization of the Phantom with new perspectives in their research. Susan Kavalier-Adler has done academic research on the 2004 film adaptation with a focus on the characterization of the Phantom, with a new perspective: a demon lover. Kavalier-Adler proposes that the relationship between the Phantom and Christine is an “entrancing and royal seduction that evokes primordial yearnings for psychic

incest between a father and a daughter” (151). She also suggests that being a genius with many talents and living in isolation, the Phantom then develops a “haunting and charismatic persona” (Kavaler-Adler 151). With such a persona, the Phantom becomes narcissistic and requires “a false and grandiose self” to live through, which Kavaler-Adler takes Christine as the Phantom’s mirroring self (151). Furthermore, Kavaler-Adler also maintains the Phantom’s role of demon lover as he “can only lead the lady to her death, which he can do as soon as she submits to marriage with him” (152). She concludes the Phantom’s attempts to confine Christine in his world turn his “hidden manipulation to overt manic erotic possession” (Kavaler-Adler 152).

Moreover, Kim Newman comments on the appearance of the Phantom in the 2004 film version. He compares the two Phantoms in 1925 and 2004 film versions, and indicates that the Phantom in 2004 does not have an equally gruesome face as the one in 1925, as “his supposed hideousness turns out to be rather mild—some boils and a half-missing eyebrow” (Newman 66). He also points out that the film does not focus on the Phantom’s “supposed obsession with Christine”—the film spends so much time portraying the father figure of the Phantom, instead of establishing “any sexual or romantic interest he might have” (Newman 66). Ironically, the Phantom expresses his longing to be loved by someone, while he is in fact loved by Madame Giry, “who has rescued him from torture, housed him and supported him for years without his ever seeming to notice” (Newman 66).

Apart from the characterization of the Phantom, Christine has also become another main focus in the direction of recent research. Critics like Caroline Navarrina de Moura notice the worth of investigation of this female hero. When watching this film, the audience expects a typical love triangle story with a haunting and distressing background: a male protagonist as the hero, a female protagonist as the damsel in distress, and another male

protagonist as the villain. Among these characters, the female protagonist should be vulnerable, passive, suffering from the villain's evil plans, and waiting for rescue from her true love. However, Kavalier-Adler notices the maturing in the heroine. In the scene of the last confrontation among the Phantom, Christine, and Raoul, Kavalier-Adler identifies the scene as a moment when the heroine can break free, and "[i]n breaking free she proves herself to be the female who can find her own power" (162). The story, in Kavalier-Adler's perspective, becomes a bildungsroman of Christine, who is "singing from her own passion, rather than merely from [the Phantom's] teachings" (162). Describing Christine as a "rapidly maturing heroine," Kavalier-Adler also comments that Christine's move of turning away from Raoul and kissing the Phantom is rather strategic (163). By consciously facing her demon lover bravely and maturely, Christine is rewarded with freedom and an embarkation on her ideal new life (Kavalier-Adler 163).

In terms of the plot, Kavalier-Adler also interprets the scenes of *Phantom* with the archetypal "Beauty and the Beast." She describes the scene where the Phantom captures Raoul and threatens Christine to go with him as an interpretation of 'Beauty and the Beast,' as the white prince and dark prince are "mirror[ing] the polarized shadow side of each other" with the heroine standing in-between (Kavalier-Adler 162). As for the ending kissing scene, she elaborates on the scene as with "Beauty of the Beast," in which "the beauty of a genuine kiss of love from the young female virgin and heroine turns the demonic lover into a true (white) prince, who can for the first time let his young female victim free to go" (Kavalier-Adler 163). She also analyses this kind of kiss as "a mythic outcome that fuels the illusions of many naïve women who think they can cure malignant narcissistic men with love", which conveys the archetypal traits in *Phantom* (Kavalier-Adler 163).



*The Phantom of the Opera* is generally categorized as melodrama. In Adam Rush's research on *Phantom*, he connects its "melodramatic narrative" and the excess performance style from both the musical and Gothic genres (142). Besides, Alison L. McKee's research focuses on the "melodramatic performance" of the musical with the sound, voice, gesture and technology (310). Kristin Ashlee Boos also identifies the stock characterization of *Phantom* by describing the main characters as "the threatening sexual 'other' of Erik, the virginal victim Christine, and the rescuing hero Raoul" (6).<sup>4</sup> She further comments on the plot that "follows certain melodramatic conventions", as it "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" (Boos 21). As for the 2004 film version, the film review written by Steve Biodrowski also categorizes the film as melodrama. Nonetheless, among the scholarly research which mention *The Phantom of the Opera* as a melodrama, none have focused specifically on the genre itself, nor have critics and scholars examined a new possibility of melodrama in creating unique characters and transcending the conventional plot arrangement in *The Phantom of the Opera*. Therefore, in this thesis, I would offer a new interpretation of the film version of *The Phantom of the Opera*, from the perspective of a modern melodrama that does not comply with the traditional melodramatic formulas: A modern melodrama that modifies its portrayal of human nature into a more complex one with plot arrangement and characterization, rather than a straightforward polarization of good and evil.

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<sup>4</sup> In the original novel, the Phantom's name is revealed as Erik. But his name is absent in the musical and the 2004 film.

## Theoretical Framework

Even though melodrama received derogatory criticism in the past, more critics vindicate its critical respectability and justify its literary value, which offers me the ground for arguing the noteworthy value of *The Phantom of the Opera*, a modern melodrama. According to Peter Brooks, the term “melodrama” had been generally regarded as pejorative, as it lacks subtlety and character development (xv). Christine Gledhill notes that melodrama “constituted a fall from the seriousness and maturity,” and it even relegated the authors to the second rank (5). However, some critics put forward the value of melodramatic elements that have been used in the works listed in the literary canon, for example, written by William Shakespeare. As William R. Morse argues, “Shakespeare’s particular adaptation of the romance tradition to Renaissance tragicomedy clearly reveals a love of what we would now call melodramatic theatre—his late plays are full of passions, journeys, spectacular events, extremes of stock characterization, and utterly improbable surprise” (19). For instance, stock characters can be found in *Romeo and Juliet*, which are the brave hero Romeo, and the innocent heroine Juliet who is waiting for rescue; in *King Lear*, The King of France and Cordelia serve as the hero and heroine respectively. Although it was believed that Shakespeare was “pendering’ to the popular expectations of his audience” (Morse 19), Morse also disputes that “Shakespeare’s embrace of the melodramatic becomes an aspect of his ongoing critique of rationality and the emergence of the essentialist discourse” (20).

Apart from stage dramas, the concept of melodrama can also be applied to genres outside the theaters. As Agustin Zarzosa puts forward: “Whereas the notion of genre suggests a category within an artistic medium, the notion of mode suggests affinities unencumbered by medium. For this reason, the argument that melodrama operates beyond the confines of its generic conventions and outside the theater itself relies heavily on the notion of mode” (237).

Peter Brooks employs such a notion of mode in his book, extending the use of the term “melodrama” from stage drama to novel, that is the “melodramatic mode” (12). Melodrama’s flexibility and broad usage convey its worth in enhancing literary value to different genres of literature.

Melodrama does have its own function and value, regardless of all the accusations against its simplicity and dramatic coincidence. Brooks indicates that “things [in melodrama] cease to be merely themselves, gestures cease to be merely tokens of social intercourse whose meaning is assigned by a social code; they become the vehicles of metaphors whose tenor suggests another kind of reality” (9). In other words, writers can utilize the elements of melodrama to express their own ideas by endowing different meanings to the stereotypical stock characters and typical plot. Leonard Anthony Lardy compares melodrama with romantic novels in his essay, claiming that the subjective approach that adapts in romantic novels can be found in melodramas as well: “A subjective approach is that technique in fiction writing in which the words, thoughts, and actions of a character reflect the ideas and beliefs of the author” (7). Therefore, the literary value of melodrama is in fact no different from that of the works of highbrow literature, when they all serve as a medium for the writers and creators to express their ideas, and reflect the social culture at that time.

Furthermore, as aforementioned, part of the definition of melodrama emphasizes its use of implausible events. Indeed, from the late nineteenth century onwards, literary critics initially regarded melodrama as a sharp counter-distinction to realism (Kelleter et al. 10). They believed that there are dichotomies between them. For example, melodrama lies in implausible events, whereas realism focuses on reality. Later, critics like Thomas Postlewait tend to see realism and melodrama as interlinked categories in their research. They take their socio-historical context into consideration, claiming there is an “interpenetration of dramatic

traits, attitudes, practices” shared between the two (Postlewait 55). There is no mutual exclusivity in between, nor a dichotomy. However, it is still undeniable that the implausible plot arrangement in melodrama, which is filled with melodramatic coincidence, violates the true happenings in reality.

Even so, Aristotle gives credit to such implausible events under certain conditions. His theory of probable impossibility provides a new approach to analyzing the plot of *The Phantom of the Opera*, by comparing it with the traditional melodrama that is full of implausible events. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle discusses the probable impossibility that a poet should prefer to. He does not think that “[a] work should present the best possible ‘copy’ of or ‘likeness’ to reality outside the work” (qtd. in Ingarden 282): “The needs of poetry make what is plausible though impossible preferable to what is possible but implausible” (Aristotle 1461b, 16-17). Aristotle continues to clarify his idea: if the poet describes something impossible, he makes an error in doing so; but as long as the impossible can be justified, his artwork will be more striking (Ingarden 282). Roman Ingarden further elaborating on Aristotle's thoughts on the impossible, suggests that what Aristotle thinks about the purpose of artwork does not refer to a full imitation of reality, but to render the work more affecting by enhancing its credibility, with a certain “intrinsic reality” (Ingarden 282-283).

Furthermore, James Phelan proposes two systems of the possibility of work in his analysis of the probable impossibility: one exists external to the work and the other exists internally (15). He maintains that “[i]n the term ‘probable impossibilities,’ the adjective refers to the text-internal system and the noun to the text-external system” (Phelan 15). In brief, Aristotle’s “probable impossibilities” can refer to the implausible events in a work that can be made possible and justified by credible arrangement. For melodrama, although it is made up of implausible events, it is still possible to achieve what Aristotle thinks a good work should

include by having an innovative plot arrangement, resulting in an enhanced creditability and quality.

### **My Argument**

The former academic research on the 2004 film adaptation of *The Phantom of the Opera* seldom includes the perspective of melodrama. As a genre that has been underrated for a long time by scholars, melodrama today changes and breaches the limits of the stock characteristics. In this thesis, I argue that, different from the traditional melodramas, the 2004 film adaptation of *The Phantom of the Opera* justifies how this modern melodrama proves itself as a valuable and respectable literary artwork, due to its portrayal of the complexity of human nature and melodramatic but innovative plot rewrite.<sup>5</sup> The main characters, including the hero, heroine, and the villain, are more complex and well-developed, which is different from the single-sided traditional stock characters. Furthermore, the film rewrites the extremely coincidental and implausible plot arrangement to create an emotional impactful story that resonates with the audience. Ingeniously, the screenwriters utilize the melodramatic elements and subvert them at the same time, so as to go beyond the limitations of melodramas.

The characterization in *The Phantom of the Opera* does not comply with the traditional stock characterization anymore, as it tends to reveal more complex sides of human nature, rather than a one-sided one. The Phantom, with his tragic background story and birth defect, becomes a villain possessing both evilness and vulnerability. His manipulation of the heroine and impulsiveness delineates him as a villain. At the same time, the story also portrays his vulnerabilities, such as his deformity and longing for intimacy. By providing the background

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<sup>5</sup> I will focus mainly on the 2004 film adaptation of *The Phantom of the Opera* instead of the musical in my thesis, since the film is a more accessible media to the readers, despite their similarities in both characterization and plot.

story of the Phantom, it seems that he is not born to be a villain, but the consequence of others' abuse. To a certain extent, the way he chooses to release the hero and heroine at the end of the play even renders him a hero when he shows his goodness inside. As for Christine, different from the typical innocent heroine who is waiting for rescue, she experiences maturing and becomes the true hero in the film. She is able to think by herself and intelligently make the move when she is confronting the Phantom in a critical situation. Eventually, she saves both herself and Raoul, the hero, and frees the Phantom from his endless loathing of the world. Furthermore, Raoul, as a hero, seems to fail in fulfilling his supposed duty of saving the heroine. Despite his bravery to embark on the journey of protecting Christine, his rescue turns out to be insignificant in freeing the heroine completely from the villain's control. The characterization of these three characters unveils the complexity of human nature, by avoiding oversimplification of their development and granting them uniqueness. The theories related to the modern melodrama proposed by critics like Peter Brooks will be employed in the analysis of characterization, focusing on its flexibility in endowing different sides of human nature to the stock characters.

As for the plot, its arrangement and rewrite also break the melodramatic boundaries of formulaic and banal plot arrangement, with the use of the enhanced credibility of implausible events, the scenes that portray a sharp contrast of complex love in human nature, and the innovative ending where the rewards and punishments betray the traditional melodrama logic. In this part, I will first employ the theories related to implausibility discussed by Aristotle, Ingarden, and Phelan, along with their emphasis on the credibility of the implausible events in an artwork. *The Phantom of the Opera* (2004), similar to the traditional melodramas, is filled with implausible events that are unlikely to happen in reality: A Phantom, who is living in the underground lair of an opera house and having control of the theatre, becomes a murderous

villain in the story; The Phantom approaches Christine as the Angel of Music, with the coincidence of Christine's deceased father having told her daughter the story of this Angel before his death; Raoul becomes the patron of the opera house where Christine is staying, reuniting with his childhood sweetheart. The screenwriters Lloyd Webber and Schumacher show their attempt to endow a certain extent of credibility and possibility regarding the existence of the Phantom, by arranging the scenes where the Phantom personally takes Christine to his lair and Madame Giry reveals the background of the Phantom, and the reason why he resides underground in the opera house. The Phantom is no longer a mythic creature out of nowhere to the characters and the audience: he is a mortal with a background story like everyone else. The existence of the Phantom is still impossible when being external to the text, but it becomes more probable within the text: In reality, it is still difficult to find a mysterious man living in the underground lair of an opera house; while it is more probable in the story, given a more solid and detail background to explain the reason why the Phantom becomes as such. Despite the unexplained implausibility of the story, the multi-dimensional characterization and the creative plot rewrite that does not comply with the melodramatic standards are powerful enough to render this lack of probability overlooked.

Furthermore, the arrangement of the scene "Music of the Night" and "All I Ask of You" delineates a sharp contrast between the Phantom and Raoul with their attitudes toward love. The former is a rather conditional love that focuses on the sensual pleasure and self-interest, while the latter is more unconditional that focuses on soul companionship and mutual respect. Such difference illustrates the complexity of various interpretations of love in human nature.

Lastly, the ending scene also transcends the melodramatic tradition of the villain being punished. The Phantom, who has been regarded as the villain all the time in the story,

eventually becomes a hero that chooses to free everyone from his control. Through the awakening of the kiss from Christine, he reveals his intrinsic goodness and realizes the true meaning of love. Consequently, he is punished by losing Christine but also rewarded with the freedom and bravery to leave his underground prison. The implausible events and ending are provocative of breaking the traditional boundaries of melodramas and shows a new possibility of the melodramatic plot.

### **Chapter Layout**

This thesis includes four chapters. Chapter One commences with an introduction that discusses some of the characteristics of melodrama, followed by the reason why I choose the 2004 film adaptation of *The Phantom of the Opera* as the subject of my research, the plot summary, the literature review, the theoretical framework, and my argument. Chapter Two focuses on the characterization in the film that transcends the typical characterization in melodramas. Chapter Three probes into the innovative and boundary-breaking plot arrangement. Last but not least, Chapter Four concludes how *The Phantom of the Opera*, as a modern melodrama, justifies itself as a valuable and respectable literary artwork.



## CHAPTER TWO

### TRANSCENDING MELODRAMATIC CHARACTERIZATION

Characterization in any literary work is an essential element, intertwining with the advancement of the plot and complementing it. However, more than two thousand years ago, Aristotle does not hold the same opinion. In his *Poetics*, which established the foundation of all dramatic theories, he argues that characterization is just “secondary” to “the first essential” plot (Aristotle 1450a, 15). Characters are just included “for the sake of the actions” (Aristotle 1450a, 20-25). On the other hand, the novelist Henry James considers characters with equal importance to the plot, asking “[w]hat is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?” (174). Indeed, forceful characters and an intriguing plot are inseparable in a well-planned literary work. Forceful characters can leave powerful impressions in the audience’s minds, in which they have usually become the representatives of the literary work and even part of the reality in the audience’s memories. For instance, “Oedipus” represents the little boys who want to kill their fathers and sleep with their mothers, and “Romeo” represents the brave young boys willing to sacrifice themselves for true love.

The conventional characterization in melodramas involves the use of stock characters, or stereotypical roles that are easily recognizable to the audience. It is typically very binary, with characters being either wholly virtuous or evil (Smith 7-8). As discussed, some examples of stock characters in melodramas include the hero, who is typically portrayed as virtuous, noble and selfless, the heroine is always the damsel in distress, who is innocent and vulnerable, the villain is depicted as wicked, cruel and selfish, and the comic, who provides humorous relief from the intense emotional and tension of the plot. Other common stock characters in melodrama include the servants of the hero and heroine, and the wise old

mentor. These characters are often used to create a clear distinction between good and evil, and to evoke strong emotional responses from the audience in traditional melodramas. Such archetypal characterization can always be found in melodramatic cartoons. As the target audience of cartoons is mainly children, the clear distinction of good and evil becomes more significant to educate morals to the children. In this case, the hero, heroine and villain in melodramatic cartoons like *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937)<sup>6</sup> are all binary and typical. Snow White is the beautiful and innocent damsel in distress waiting to be rescued every time, the noble Prince saves the heroine, and the Queen is wicked in attempts to kill Snow White out of jealousy.

Nonetheless, the characterization in melodramas has evolved significantly over time, reflecting changes in society, culture, and artistic trends. While the conventional characterization in melodramas was typically very binary and archetypal, more recent melodramas have tended to be more nuanced and complex in their characterization. For example, in *Les Misérables* (2012),<sup>7</sup> the development of the characterization can be found in the heroic Jean Valjean. He has experienced personal growth in his characterization: Jean Valjean becomes the hero helping and protecting others, despite his initial identity as a prisoner and thief. In this modern melodrama, the characters like Jean Valjean are often more fully realized and multi-dimensional, reflecting the true diversity and complexity of the human nature. As Brooks has suggested, melodramas are used as the “vehicles of metaphors” that the authors can utilize to reflect another part of reality (9). In *The Phantom of the Opera*, the main characters, including the hero, heroine, and the villain, are more complex and well-developed,

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<sup>6</sup> *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* is a 1937 American animated musical fantasy film produced by Walt Disney Productions.

<sup>7</sup> *Les Misérables* is a 2012 musical film directed by Tom Hooper from a screenplay by William Nicholson, Alain Boublil, Claude-Michel Schönberg, and Herbert Kretzmer.

which is different from the single-sided traditional stock characters that traditional melodramas usually have in stories. The hero becomes comparatively powerless in saving others, the heroine is no more vulnerable, and the villain becomes a hero at the end. As such, it reveals the attempts from Lloyd Webber and Schumacher to reflect the complexity of human nature in being multi-dimensional, transcending the traditional melodramatic characterization.

### **The Phantom**

Winfried Herget once discussed the pleasure that the villains in melodramas tend to provide in his essay. He notes the ideas of “the perverse gaze of sympathy” and the “masochistic pleasures of sentimental literature,” in which they both investigate the potential for enjoyment of readers and viewers in the suffering and pain (25). The audience can receive such pleasure under two scenarios: “[O]n the one hand, the audience may relish the presentation of extreme peril—and more so the longer the rescue is delayed; on the other hand, it is exonerated by the anticipated punishment of the villain” (Herget 25). In most traditional melodramas, such pleasure seems to be guaranteed due to its requirement of fulfilling poetic justice in the plot. The polarization of the good characters and evil characters is distinct. Herget elaborates on the polarization using the concept of monopathy suggested by Robert Heilman, calling it the ensuing “singleness of feeling that gives one the sense of wholeness” (qtd. in Herget 26). He further elaborates: “Melodramatic monopathy relieves the spectator from choosing between options that remain largely indistinct in the complexities of every-day experience” (Herget 26). In other words, the distinction between good and evil in melodramas is always emphasized and palpable, so that the audience does not need to think twice before they choose to enjoy the evildoings and punishments of the villains. As the villains are all entirely corrupted, and the crimes they commit are also inexcusable until they

receive the punishment deserved. Nonetheless, Herget's elaboration on the audience's pleasure of spectating the melodramatic villain is not applicable to the situation of the Phantom, as the villainy of the Phantom consequently arouses sympathy of the audience, instead of satisfaction. Acting as the villain in *The Phantom of the Opera* (2004), the Phantom is portrayed as a more humanized villain than a traditional pure villain in melodramas, with the complex existence of villainy, vulnerabilities, and virtues inside him.

Different from the traditional characterization of a pure villain in melodramas, the personal growth of the Phantom is depicted in the film, manifesting the possibility of becoming a redeemed villain. In this case, before his redemption happens, it is inevitable for him to demonstrate some typical villainous traits in his behavior and language. He is both manipulative and possessive to Christine, the heroine, with his attempts to separate the hero and the heroine. After Raoul reunites with Christine, the Phantom immediately makes derogatory comments about Raoul: "*Insolent boy! This slave of / fashion, basking in your glory! / Ignorant fool! This brave, young / suitor, sharing in my triumph!*" (Lloyd Webber and Schumacher 32).<sup>8</sup> Being the teacher of the innocent heroine, he wishes his authoritative comments on this "insolent" hero can render Christine thinking less of Raoul. By stating how Raoul is "a slave of fashion" basking in Christine's glory, the Phantom attempts to separate them into different worlds and two kinds of people: one regarding music and opera as fashions that manifest his social status, whereas the other concerning music and opera as true art to appreciate. Besides, the expression "my triumph" that he uses to refer to Christine demonstrates precisely his possessive desire for the heroine, by rendering her as his property. This conveys how the Phantom believes that Christine belongs to one of his own magnificent

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<sup>8</sup> Lloyd Webber, Andrew, and Joel Schumacher. Script of *The Phantom of the Opera*. *Script Slug*, <https://www.scriptslug.com/script/phantom-of-the-opera-2004>. All subsequent references to this script will be noted parenthetically in the text.

creations. The success of Christine represents his achievement. Such expression also echoes what Kavalier-Adler remarks on his narcissism, in which he attempts to mold the heroine to “reflect his own idealized image” (153).

Apart from the languages the Phantom uses to define Christine as his possession, in the theme song “The Phantom of the Opera”, the lyrics also exemplify the success of the Phantom’s molding of Christine as their souls are now connected and combined as one, implying his manipulation of the heroine:

CHRISTINE. *Those who have seen your face draw back in fear... I am the mask you wear...*

PHANTOM. *It's me they hear...*

BOTH. *Your/My spirit and my/your voice, in one combined: the Phantom of the Opera is there - inside your/my mind... (35)*

These lyrics reflect their unity of two souls as one through music: when Christine is singing, she immerses herself in the world created by the Phantom and sings for his spirit. Yet, their unity is in fact how the Phantom uses Christine’s voice to perform his pieces of music to the public. This verse also implies Christine’s loss of individuality, as she is merely the vocalist of the Phantom when she sings. Therefore, their unity is another representation of the Phantom’s manipulation of Christine.

Furthermore, his use of hypnosis on Christine is another kind of manipulation shown in the film. Christine is mesmerized in a Svengali/Trilby-like hypnotic trance when the Phantom is drawing her towards the mirror—the entrance of the Phantom’s underground lair. Svengali is a character featured in the French novel *Trilby* written by George du Maurier in 1894. He turns Trilby, a young half-Irish girl, into a famous singer. At the same time, he also seduces, controls, and exploits Trilby, in which the situation is much like that of the Phantom and

Christine. The Phantom does not ask for the permission of Christine for him to dominate her mind by using hypnosis. This is rather disrespectful, implying how the Phantom ignores Christine as an individual, and he does not allow any resistance from Christine. Later, when he notices Christine's secret engagement ring, he fiercely grasps the chain that holds it and rips it from Christine's throat. He claims: "Your chains are still mine - you / belong to me!" (80). His claiming of Christine's ownership manifests his intolerance of losing entire control of Christine. His use of the diction "chains" here seems to consider Christine as his slave, revealing his selfish possessiveness towards Christine instead of genuine love at this stage—Christine has also once called the Phantom "master" earlier in the story, indicating their master-slave relationship (33). This scene also suggests how the Phantom misunderstands the meaning of love and marriage as possessiveness and ownership. His feeling for Christine which he always claims as love becomes false and fabricated. It is merely possessiveness that has been romanticized.

Moreover, he is an impulsive person, especially when his weaknesses are touched upon. His impulsiveness is even dangerous due to his lack of moral consciousness. Before Christine takes off his mask for the first time, they are having a romantic atmosphere with Christine "lovingly caresses his face" and he "responds deeply to her touch" (41). But when Christine removes his mask, he is outraged about the revealing of his weakness. He reacts furiously, and even throws Christine to the ground and curses her: "*Damn you! You little prying / Pandora! You little demon - is / this what you wanted to see? Curse / you! You little lying Delilah! / You little viper - now you cannot / ever be free!*" (41). In this verse, the name Pandora refers to the first woman on earth in Greek mythology, who had been given a box and instructed not to open it. But she disobeyed and opened the box out of curiosity, resulting in the release of human ills into the world. As for the name Delilah, it refers to Samson's

mistress in the biblical stories, who cut off Samson's hair so as to deprive him of his power. Therefore, the Phantom is cursing Christine as an evil woman who reveals his vulnerability and weakens him out of her own curiosity. The Phantom's reactions also show that the change in his emotions is rapid. His emotional unstableness arouses terror in both Christine's and the audience's minds, which completely shatters their fantasies of the Phantom as an ideal romanticized figure. Besides, the Phantom has committed three murders in total in the story: his owner in the past, the stagehand Joseph Bouquet, and the lead tenor Ubaldo Piangi. Among these three, the murder of the stagehand he commits and reveals to the public intentionally proves he acts without thinking carefully about the consequences it will bring. His killing of this innocent man and displaying his corpse publicly turn his situation more complicated and unforgivable. He kills the stagehand simply because the stagehand sees him. After he kills, the people realize the danger and violence of the opera ghost, and the Phantom will then become more isolated from society. Christine, who is already terrified by his deformity and fury, seems to believe he is as ruthless as she imagines, and "*will / kill and kill again*" (67). What he has done has eventually kept Christine farther away from him.

On the other hand, as aforementioned, the film also focuses on the portrayal of the vulnerabilities of the Phantom, instead of focusing on his cruelty only, which is unconventional for the depictions of villains in traditional melodramas. The Phantom's deformity serves as one of his vulnerabilities, which arouses sympathy from both Christine and the audience. The Phantom always feels inferior because of his deformity. According to Christine, the Phantom has a face "[s]o / distorted, deformed", and "it [is] hardly / a face" (67). As for the Phantom, he describes his face as a face "*which earned a mother's / fear and loathing*" (101) and himself as a "*loathsome / gargoyle, who burns in [h]ell*" (42). The dehumanization in these descriptions provides the reasons for Phantom's inferiority and self-

isolation. In the scene where Madame Giry tells the story of her first encounter with the young Phantom, his owner takes off the sack that covers his face and whips him. After the owner's whipping, the boy "crawl[s] through the straw to retrieve sack which he pulls back over his head" (83). His haste in wearing back the sack also exemplifies his inferiority of the appearance. Besides, he maintains his isolation and tragic life as consequences of his birth defect. The Phantom believes that his face is "*the infection which poisons [the] / love [of him and Christine]*" (101). Born with this deformity that leads to his mother's loathing and abandonment, he affirms himself difficult to receive any humanly experiences like being loved and cared for. After cursing Christine for taking off his mask, he pitifully bewails: "*Fear can turn to love – you'll / learn to see, to find the man / behind the monster, this... / repulsive carcass, who seems a / beast, but secretly dreams of / beauty, secretly... secretly... / Oh, Christine...*" (42). The "beauty" in his imploring can be referred to companionship and love. The way he begs for love renders him more miserable and pathetic, his deepest longing for intimacy between people becomes another weakness.

Subverting the wholeness emphasized by the melodramatic characterization, the Phantom does not fall into the extreme of either evilness or virtue throughout the story. The murder of his owner that the Phantom committed when he was small chronologically marks the commencement of his murderous behavior. But it does not render him entirely evil: as an abuser, the owner seems to be less pitiful than an innocent victim to the audience. Murder is immoral and illegal, but the owner is portrayed as if he deserves such an ending as the plot unfolds. In such instance, regardless of the murder of the owner, the Phantom does not kill anyone in the opera house for his self-interest before the plot getting more intense. He is not completely devilish in this regard.

Moreover, the Phantom's protectiveness towards the one he cares about is subtly



implied in the film. There is no detailed description of the relationship between the Phantom and Christine when Christine was small. The audience can only interpret it from pieces of indirect evidence. Christine sees the Phantom as the Angel of Music; when she talks about the Angel of Music, it reveals the way how the Phantom treats her. Christine tells Meg, her friend, the story of the Angel of Music, claiming that she would be protected by an Angel of Music, according to her deceased father (27). In the song “Angel of Music” sung by Christine mainly, she also calls the Angel of Music, which is referred to the Phantom, as “[g]uide and guardian” (27). Given the harmonious relationship between the Phantom and Christine at the beginning of the story, it seems that the Phantom performs the role of the Angel of Music in a qualified manner with his protection over Christine.

The Phantom has a friendly relationship with Madame Girya as well. Madame Girya acts as the messenger of the Phantom, delivering his message to the managers of the opera house. She also demonstrates her understanding of the traps and mazes designed by the Phantom when she saves Raoul or leads him to find the Phantom. Without facing any threats from the Phantom, Madame Girya concerns and cares about the Phantom. Whenever the Phantom appears in front of the public, in both the scene of Masquerade and “The Point of No Return,” her reactions toward the Phantom’s confessions to Christine are always touched and filled with tears, showing her concern the Phantom’s happiness. If the Phantom is indeed evil and mistreats Madame Girya, the one who saved him when he was small, he is unable to maintain such relationship with Madame Girya. Therefore, in view of the Phantom’s murder of his abuser, his protectiveness towards Christine, and his friendly relationship with Madame Girya, it can be inferred that the Phantom possesses both virtue and evilness at the beginning of the story, without either one being extreme: He is neither a virtuous saint nor a traditional melodramatic villain.

Moreover, the fundamental reason of the Phantom's distortion comes from the hostility he received from other people. As the plot unfolds, it reveals that the Phantom is not born to be a murderous villain; he is distorted due to the hostility he received when he was small. The villainous Phantom is actually a creation of how the world has gone wrong in treating people born with deformity and judging by appearance. He does not know anything but the malice of the world since he was small, as he is abandoned by his mother and then lives under the abuse of his owner. Violence seems to be the only feasible solution that frees him from his suffering, given the fact that he can escape from the abuser only after he murders him. He is ignorant in the sense of without being properly socialized. As a result, he commits a crime and fails to realize the possibility of other choices. He also develops the violent tendency and excessive obsession with the heroine, in which he misunderstands both the consequence of violence and the true meaning of love.

However, his redemption in the ending suggests his personal growth that there is certain heroic virtue developing in him after his realization of truth. Such realization lies in the scene where Christine shows him the true meaning of love, and then he understands that goodness still exists among people in the world, in which showing goodness to others is also a possible solution of the problem he encounters. This anagnorisis that the Phantom experiences after receiving the kiss from Christine renders him both guilty and ashamed for his actions. He thereby tells Christine and Raoul: *"Take her - forget me - forget all / of this... Leave me alone - forget / all you've seen... Go now - don't / let them find you! Take the / boat - swear to me, never to tell / the secret you know of the angel in / hell - go... go now... go now and / leave me!"* (107). Here, he describes himself as "the angel in hell," instead of the Angel of Music. It further exemplifies his recognition of his error and ignorance. He is punished eventually, by losing Christine and facing his loneliness. At the same time, he attempts to right the wrong

that he has done by freeing everyone from his control. His redemption even achieves what the hero aims at in the story—freeing the heroine and others from the villain. He eventually demonstrates the bravery to reconcile with his tragic past and suppress his inconsiderate desire of manipulating and possessing others. In a nutshell, the characterization of the Phantom subverts the standards of pure melodramatic villains, as the film unveils the growth of the Phantom from evil to good. The villain is no longer one-sided and simple in this melodrama. His villainy is complexly structured, and virtue uneasily developed.

### **Christine**

Just as the Phantom is portrayed differently from a melodramatic villain, Christine Daae also performs as an unconventional heroine in the film. She demonstrates her coming-of-age from being an innocent damsel in distress to a brave female hero as the story progresses. In traditional melodramas, a conventional plot line can always be found, in which “[t]he heroine struggles helplessly to protect her body and her honor from the villain, and the hero arrives at the last moment to save her” (Rebeck 12). In her discussion of the heroines in melodramas, Theresa Rebeck mentions the “extreme passivity” of the heroine, and how the old melodramas attempt to undermine her subjectivity and objectify the heroine by “the lascivious male gaze and the threat of rape” (13-14). In other words, a qualified heroine in a traditional melodrama is to be innocent and vulnerable enough to emphasize her passivity and powerlessness, when she is facing threats from a male villain.

In *The Phantom of the Opera*, Christine is apparently innocent and even naïve at the beginning of the story. Compared with Meg whose age and life experience are both similar to hers, Christine appears to be rather irrational and unrealistic. When she tells her friend Meg the existence of the Angel of Music, Meg immediately suspects if this angel is true or not:

MEG. Christine... do you believe? ... Do you think the spirit of your father is coaching

you?

CHRISTINE. Who else, Meg? Who...??? (Distracted) *Father once spoke of an angel... I used to dream he'd appear... Now, as I sing, I can sense him... and I know he's here...*  
...

MEG. *Christine, you must have been dreaming. Stories like this can't come true... Christine, you're talking in riddles and it's not like you... (27)*

In this scene, Meg shows a different way of examining the story of the Angel of Music.

Although the film does not reveal both Christine and Meg's ages explicitly, the appearances of the two actresses are both beautiful and young. Their appearances suggest that they should have a similar age without a great difference.<sup>9</sup> As young females, they demonstrate two possibilities of looking at mysterious and groundless tales: rational and superstitious.

Although Meg is also described as innocent like Christine, she is rational enough to suspect the authenticity of the tale (6). She seems to believe that the deceased is deceased, and the story of spirits is only superstition. As for Christine, her sweetness and innocence are the main reasons why she believes in the tale, leading to her naivety. Such naivety even blinds her from realizing the true identity of the Angel of Music: despite being called the Angel of Music, the Phantom in fact does not show any angelic traits in front of Christine before Christine truly meets him in the story. He hides in the shadows and gives Christine a single red rose with a black ribbon after her performance, which is hardly regarded as what angels will do. But Christine's naivety persuades her, along with her blind faith in her father.

Similar to Meg and unlike Christine, Raoul also demonstrates his rationality and disbelief in the tale of the Angel of Music. When Christine reunites with Raoul and

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<sup>9</sup> Emmy Rossum, the actress who plays Christine Daae, was born in 1986; while Jennifer Ellison, the actress who plays Meg Giry, was born in 1983. See [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0002536/?ref\\_=tt\\_cl\\_t\\_2](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0002536/?ref_=tt_cl_t_2) and [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0255204/?ref\\_=tt\\_cl\\_t\\_9](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0255204/?ref_=tt_cl_t_9).

reminisces about their past, she excitedly confides the existence of the Angel with him: “Father said, ‘When I’m in heaven, / child, I will send the Angel of / Music to you.’ Well, father is / dead, Raoul, and I have been / visited by the Angel of Music” (31). However, same as Meg, Raoul also regards Christine’s story of the Angel of Music as a fantasy with no interest in it: “No doubt of it. And now we go to supper!” (31). His reply shows that he cares about having supper with Christine more than listening to her fairy tale. To Raoul, Christine seems to remain as the little girl who loved daydreaming in their childhood, thereby further exemplifies how innocent and naïve that Christine maintains even when she grows up. Moreover, as an orphan growing up in an opera house, the innocent Christine has been taken good care of and protected well by Madame Girya. Her innocence is preserved, without being influenced badly by the cast. Eventually, she does not suspect the tale and the identity of the Angel like Meg, or dismiss it as a fantasy like Raoul revealing both her innocence and naivety.

Furthermore, Christine initially is victimized as the damsel in distress, which is typical for the melodramatic heroine, in which her passivity and vulnerability are amplified at the beginning of the story. She lost her parents when she was small, resulting in the loss of parental protection. Being an orphan, she is unable to protect herself and becomes vulnerable. Even though Madame Girya treats Christine like her own daughter, she is still an orphan suffering from the death of both her parents. When her parents were alive, Christine seemed to have a better relationship with her father, as she mentions her father seven times in the early scenes of the film, but none for her mother (10, 26, 27, 30, 31). Her attachment to her deceased father emphasizes her dependence and blind trust in everything her father told her when she was small. Such dependence and blind trust thereby lead to her passivity, as she fails to demonstrate critical thinking and only follows what her father told her. This is also

dangerous as her dependence becomes habitual later when she meets the Phantom, as she projects her longing for fatherly guidance and love onto the Phantom. This renders her vulnerable in front of the villain and easily victimized. Her dependence on the Phantom is revealed when she asks for guidance and forgiveness from the Phantom: “*Angel! I hear you! speak – I / listen... stay by my side, guide / me! Angel, my soul was weak - / forgive me... Enter at last, / Master!*” (33). In the leitmotif of “Angel of Music”, this recurring musical phrase also highlights Christine’s dependence on the Phantom, with her addressing the Phantom as “[g]uide and guardian” and “protector” (27, 33, 88). Eventually, she is subjected to the Phantom’s manipulation due to her irrational and even superstitious faith in the Angel of Music, the tale told by her father.

Moreover, Christine seldom makes her own decisions. For example, when Carlotta, the prima donna, gives up her role as a leading actress during the rehearsal of *Hannibal*, it is Madame Girya who recommends Christine as the replacement. Christine, referring to the script, is then terrified and nervous, and she needs encouragement from Madame Girya and Meg to perform in front of others for the first time (20-21). This scene suggests her passivity as she does not recommend herself, even though she is well-taught by the Angel of Music. It seems that she is unable to strive for opportunities for herself, but waiting for someone to arrange her fate. Her reactions towards Madame Girya’s recommendation are not repulsed but only hesitate. She does not refuse, nor make excuses. We can infer, either she also longs for an opportunity to perform on-stage as a leading actress, or she is too reluctant to reject others’ decisions. Both possibilities suggest her passivity in deciding her actions, leading to her potential victimization eventually.

Such victimization of a weak heroine is essential in traditional melodramas. Rebeck indicates the significance of the powerlessness of the weak, as it demonstrates the conflict

between “disempowerment with suffering, poverty, femininity and virtue” and “power with money and masculinity” (27). She further elaborates that, “[t]he largely lower-class audience which frequent the melodrama thus celebrate the virtue of the weak, who remain unstained by the corruption of the power they cannot attain” (Rebeck 27). In such case, the traditional melodramas utilize the vulnerability found in the virtuous heroine, in order to achieve their educational purpose of “uncovering, demonstrating and making operative the essential moral universe” as aforementioned (Brooks 15). However, in *The Phantom of the Opera*, this modern melodrama attempts to unveil another kind of education to the audience, apart from solely praising the good and condemning the evil, i.e. the personal growth of the weak. Despite being vulnerable and passive at the beginning of the story, Christine shows her individual thinking to make decisions and her bravery to take over the role of hero, freeing herself from the stereotype of a naïve and passive damsel in distress.

Although the Phantom acts as the villain who attempts to snatch her happiness, Christine relies on him in emotional and career aspects, and this reliance renders her powerless to resist him initially. In the end, she learns to choose what she truly longs for. As discussed, Christine projects her desire for fatherly affection and protection onto the Phantom. She thereby trusts the Phantom wholeheartedly before she truly meets him face-to-face, and before their relationship gets worsen. But when the plot develops, the violence and possessiveness of the Phantom terrify her. When she visits her father’s mausoleum, she sings “Wishing You Were Somehow Here Again”. It is a song that seems to express her yearning for her father’s companion, but the lyrics also imply her lingering memories with the Phantom, as she sings: “*You were once my one companion... / You were all that mattered... You / were once a friend and father - / then my world was shattered... / Wishing you were somehow here / again... Wishing you were somehow / near... Sometimes it seemed, if I / just*

*dreamed, somehow you would be / here...*" (86). These are applicable to both her father and the Phantom. On the surface, it seems that she hopes her deceased father is still alive and stays with her till now. But the "companion", "friend" and "father" can also refer to the Phantom, the once fatherly companion of Christine before he reveals his true self. In this case, the influence of the Phantom on Christine is too powerful that it is difficult for her to abandon her memories and relationship with him, which renders her vulnerable when she is in front of him.

Apart from fatherly love, the Phantom also means her career advancement in singing. If she leaves the Phantom, this may bring failure in her career, as the Phantom is the one who teaches her to sing and trains her skills. The Phantom is experienced, and he knows better than anyone else how Christine can continue to excel in her singing skills. It is similar to the case in *Trilby*. Trilby, the heroine in the novel, is kind, cheerful, and tone-deaf. Svengali, a manipulative musician and the villain, hypnotizes Trilby and transforms her into a diva called La Svengali. However, after Svengali is attacked and dies later, Trilby is free from his hypnosis, but at the same time loses her singing skills. She is unable to sing in tune anymore, and laughs are coming from the audience, marking the end of her singing career. As for Christine, she understands the Phantom's talent in music and acknowledges he is the one who "*inspired [her] voice*" (91). The Phantom, in the Masquerade scene, also states that if Christine "*wish to excel, she has much still to learn*" from him (80). The influence the Phantom exerts on her is similar to that Svengali exerts on Trilby. Under Svengali's hypnosis and manipulation, Trilby becomes a diva. Likewise, under the Phantom's guidance and manipulation, Christine has the opportunity of becoming a diva. Therefore, if Christine chooses Raoul in the end, she faces the risk of losing her singing teacher, and then her career.

Nonetheless, for the first time, Christine is able to free herself from the stereotypical



passivity and vulnerability of a melodramatic heroine, demonstrating her inner growth and power to make self-decisions and save everyone in the end as a female hero. Near the end of the story, in the scene where Christine visits her father's mausoleum, she shows signs of her growth in attempts to retrieve control of her life, but not enough to fully free herself from being a weak heroine. In the song "Wishing You Were Somehow Here Again", she expresses both her resolution of giving up the past and her need for help: "*Too many years fighting back / tears... Why can't the past just / die...? Wishing you were somehow / here again... Knowing we must say / goodbye... Try to forgive... / Teach me to live... Give me the / strength to try... Help me say goodbye*" (87). As aforementioned, this song can be interpreted as Christine singing to her father, in which she pleads for guidance and strength from her father. The imperatives she uses in this song also reveal her decision of choosing Raoul instead of the Phantom. She has already made up her mind and understands true love is more significant to her life, given that she has to lose all the memories and talents that she gained from the Phantom in the past. At this stage, although she is still attempting to rely on the strength of others to accomplish her wants, she takes the initiative to decide her fate, instead of passively letting others like Raoul or Madame Giry decide for her.

Christine, as a heroine who is expected to be vulnerable, starts to reveal the traits of her bravery later by confronting her fear. After Raoul has planned to capture the Phantom during the performance of the Phantom's opera, Christine, arranged as the leading actress by the Phantom, is getting afraid of what consequences this opera will bring. In this short scene, Christine firstly indicates her fear to Raoul: "Raoul, I'm frightened - don't make / me do this... Raoul, it scares me - / don't put me through this ordeal by / fire... He'll take me, I know... / We'll be parted forever... He / won't let me go... What I once / used to dream I now dread... If he / finds me, it won't ever end" (91). Then a new piece of music, which has never played as

any other leitmotifs earlier from this scene, is played. Christine sings the following verse with this new music, implying her final and true maturing in her mind: *“Twisted every way, what answer can / I give? Am I to risk my life, to / win the chance to live? Can I / betray the man who once inspired my / voice? Do I become his prey? Do I / have any choice? He kills without a thought, he murders all that's / good... I know I can't refuse, and / yet, I wish I could. Oh God – if I / agree, what horrors wait for me in / this - the Phantom's Opera...?”* (91-92). She indicates all the inner conflicts that she has in mind to both Raoul and the audience in this verse, knowing that she now has the power to choose and decide the fate of everyone. No matter how terrified and struggling she is, her virtues tell her what the right choice for everyone’s sake should be. She needs to confront her fear, so as to free everyone from the maniac control of the Phantom.

Kavaler-Adler describes the mature Christine as a young female who can break free, and in breaking free “she proves herself to be the female who can find her own power” (162). Thus, Christine confronts the Phantom bravely in both the scenes of “Don Juan Triumphant”, and the crisis of the Phantom capturing Raoul near the end. At the end of the “Don Juan Triumphant” scene, Christine, who is now emotionally grown, “quite calmly” removes the Phantom’s mask, and faces him consciously (98). It is different from the first time when she removes the Phantom’s mask; at that time, she is scared of his deformity which may be beyond her expectation of the image of an angel. But now, she is no more a naïve young female who lives in her own dreams; she knows that she has to wake up and face the reality. Although she is more mature and emotionally sophisticated now, her virtues still exist within her. Therefore, her second removal of the Phantom’s mask can also imply her kind attempt to offer this poor outcast an opportunity to face the public again. Their roles have reversed from this point, as Christine becomes the Phantom’s teacher of socialization, instead of just being

his student. Besides, her maturing and virtues have turned her into an empowered female hero. Her compassionate kiss for the Phantom becomes a “weapon” that saves everyone, including the Phantom, from evil. Such kiss, encouraged by her pity of the Phantom, symbolizes her true acceptance of him. She also shows her courage and eagerness to understand what kind of life the Phantom has been living, and what leads to his distortion, instead of simply afraid of him. She is no longer the typical melodramatic damsel in distress who needs to be rescued at the end of the story. Eventually, she is rewarded to embark on a new life with her lover. Her bildungsroman thereby suggests the significance of females being independent and virtuous to the audience.

### **Raoul**

Raoul is a rather vulnerable hero in *The Phantom of the Opera*, as he fails to fulfill his heroic duties to a certain extent. He does not demonstrate a perfect hero to the audience’s expectation; instead, he shows both the ideal and real sides of an ordinary man. As discussed, a melodramatic hero is also often portrayed as a handsome, brave man, who saves the heroine at the end. Raoul does possess some typical traits of traditional melodramatic heroes. He possesses physical attractiveness and noble manners to both the people in the opera house and the audience. As indicated in the script where the young Raoul appears on the scene for the first time, he is “dashing and handsome” (8). Besides, when Raoul meets everyone in the opera house as the new patron, the crowd is described as “impressed, overly adoring,” and Meg also whispers to Christine about how handsome he is (10). These descriptions manifest Raoul’s attractiveness explicitly. Afterward, Raoul also expresses himself in a noble, humble, and courteous manner: “My parents and I are honoured to support all the arts, especially the world renowned Opera Populaire”, “I believe I'm keeping you for your rehearsal. I will be here this evening to share your great triumph”, and he also apologizes to Reyer, the maestro,

for interrupting their rehearsal (10-11). As the patron of the opera house and an aristocrat, it is unnecessary for him to show much respect for the people in the opera house, as they are mostly poor lower-class people working there. But Raoul, who seems to be virtuous and morally good till now, has demonstrated his appreciation and kindness towards the people. He also approaches Christine with an ideal image of Prince Charming: his being handsome, rich, and her childhood sweetheart, which reinforces his attractiveness to both the heroine and the audience.

Moreover, he is courageous when he sees the heroine is in danger. He is protective over Christine when he thinks something wrong has happened to her. When he hears a mysterious voice coming out from Christine's locked room, he bravely shouts out Christine's name and asks who else is in the room, instead of turning away (33-34). Furthermore, when the Phantom attempts to escape by disappearing down a trap door in the Masquerade scene, Raoul follows him without any hesitation. In a "demonic" maze that has "almost total darkness", he is still catching up with the Phantom fearlessly (80). The same bravery is also demonstrated when Madame Girya leads him to find the Phantom after Christine is captured. Even Madame Girya, the one who understands the Phantom the most and also the one who has a more harmonious relationship with him, dares not go too far in the Phantom's underground kingdom (100). But Raoul, in the urge of saving his lover, "rips off his tailcoat and neckwear", with wound that begins to bleed, continues for the rescue of the innocent heroine, showing his determination and courage again (10). His bravery revealed in these scenes is often connected with the heroine that he loves. He indeed shares a genuine love with Christine, as he stands out every time when she is in need of rescue. The sufferings of Christine arouse his chivalry instinct of saving the weak and loved one.

However, Raoul is also an impulsive and overconfident hero who fails to liberate the

heroine from the manipulation of the villain. His attempts of rescuing the heroine are mostly out of blind bravery. In the Masquerade scene where he blindly follows the Phantom to the demonic maze with a sole sword, he is brave but also unprepared with not much understanding of his enemy. He is unaware that “the noose of the Punjab Lasso is now hovering behind him” (80). Fortunately, with the guidance of Madame Girya, he is able to escape from the maze without being hung by the lasso. But this also renders him a vulnerable hero who needs to be rescued by others. In the scene where he discovers Christine has gone to the cemetery alone, he rushes there without second thoughts and confronts the Phantom with simply a sword again. Although he displays his “bravery, skill and courage”, the Phantom succeeds in harming him on the shoulder (89). His blind bravery indeed puts him at risk again. Even though he wins the Phantom in a sword fight, his victory seems to be insignificant to the true liberation of Christine from the Phantom's control.

Near the end of the story, the overconfidence in his plan even puts the heroine and everyone in danger, when he attempts to accomplish his ambition of saving everyone in the opera house. He confidently introduces his plan to the managers, stating that they have all been blind, but now he finds the solution of solving the problematic Phantom (90). He also assures that if they follow the Phantom's demand of playing his opera, their victory will be awaited by capturing the Phantom successfully (91). Ironically, he overestimates his plan and underestimates what the Phantom can do again, resulting in the abduction of Christine and the fire of the opera house. Especially when the Phantom is holding and caressing Christine, Raoul is too powerless to do anything in his box. All he can do is watch and wait, and this certainly emphasizes his vulnerability. Even though he tracks down the Phantom with Madame Girya's help, he does not have any plan to free Christine, except for pleading and begging for compassion from the Phantom (102-103). He even gets suspended by the

Phantom with a rope, becoming the one who needs to be rescued. Eventually, it is Christine who frees both of them from the control of the Phantom, showing a reversal of the roles between the hero and the heroine. Raoul, as the hero of the story, becomes a rather supportive role in the film, compared to the heroine.

Furthermore, Raoul's love for Christine is sometimes depicted as a male domination over the heroine. His status seems to be superior in his relationship with Christine as he appears to be the dominating one. In the scene of the reunion of Raoul and Christine, he does not seriously take Christine's tale of the Angel of Music into account. He makes arrangements for Christine instead, ignoring her unwillingness of following his orders:

RAOUL. No doubt of it. And now we go to supper!

CHRISTINE. (firmly) No, Raoul; the Angel of Music is very strict!

RAOUL. I shan't keep you up late!

CHRISTINE. No, Raoul...

RAOUL. *You must change. I'll order my carriage. Two minutes - Little Lotte.* (31; emphasis added)

In spite of Christine's firmness in rejecting his invitation to supper, Raoul focuses on his excitement of their reunion merely, without asking for Christine's permission. The diction "you must" and "I'll" that he uses indicates his sole decision for both Christine and himself. Christine, as the female and Raoul's lover, does not earn Raoul's respect as others do. The difference here somehow suggests that Raoul regards his courteous manners in front of the public as a kind of aristocratic responsibility, in which it is necessary for him to show his noble side in front of others. As for Christine, who is his childhood sweetheart, it is unnecessary for him to put on the mask of an aristocrat anymore. To a certain extent, his true side emerged, in which he tends to take control of his lover. His neglect of Christine's

willingness is again revealed in the scene where Christine has returned to the opera house after meeting the Phantom face-to-face for the first time. Even though Madame Girya and Meg assert to Raoul that Christine prefers seeing no one now as she needs to rest, Raoul still searches for Christine out of worries (49, 55). However, his worries do not take Christine's feelings into account. It is undeniable that Raoul loves and cares for Christine, but his actions seem to be rather self-gratification.

Besides his neglect of the heroine's willingness, Raoul even denies Christine's fear when she tries to confide to him. In the scene that happens after the murder of the stagehand Joseph Buquet, Christine flees to the roof with Raoul and tells him about the Phantom of the Opera. But Raoul denies her nightmare at once, claiming that there is no Phantom of the Opera, and what Christine has heard is just a dream, even though Christine clearly tells him she has been to the place where the Phantom resides (67-68). He may deny Christine's feelings in the name of comfort, but such denial also implies the refusal of his belief in Christine as an individual.

Melodramatic heroes are always "morally strong", and Raoul is no exception of such (Stavans 269). His strong sense of morality even gives him a moral high ground of forcing the females to do something they are reluctant to do. After Madame Girya saves him from the Phantom's maze, he realizes the fact that she knows the Phantom better than the others. Even though Madame Girya is frightened and rejects to tell him more at first, Raoul begs her by stating "for all our sakes" (81). Eventually, Madame Girya decides to tell him the story of the Phantom. Analogously, a similar case happens when Christine is also frightened and wavers with her decision of performing in the Phantom's opera. Christine remains indecisive until Raoul "tenderly" tells her: "*Christine, Christine, don't think / that I don't care - but every hope / and every prayer rests on you / now...*" (92). In both cases, the females are

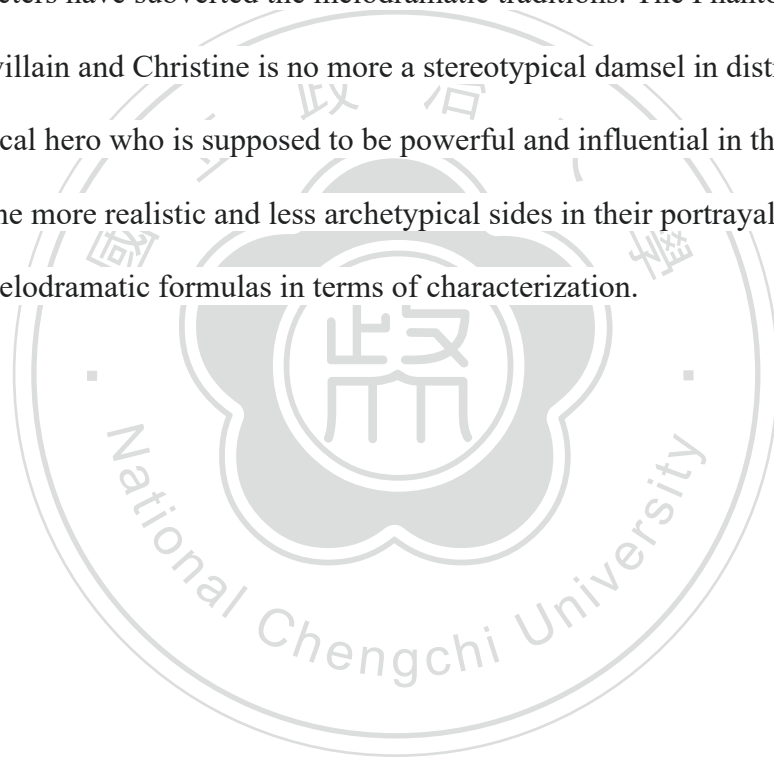
encountering moral blackmail from the hero. Moral blackmail, as explained by Simon Keller, is a situation in which the blackmailers “manipulate [their] victims by changing their circumstances so that they face moral demands they would otherwise avoid” and “tr[ies] to make them do what [they] want them to do by making the alternatives morally unacceptable” (706). What Raoul has done is claiming that his request is for everyone’s sake. If Madame Giry and Christine refuse, they “cannot feel morally justified in refusing to do what the blackmailer wants [them] to do” (Keller 706). Therefore, Madame Giry and Christine cannot refuse Raoul’s request, regardless of their reluctance. Despite Raoul’s courtesy towards Madame Giry and sincere love towards Christine, he tends to influence the females verbally so as to maintain the goodness and morality in the story.

Different from the stereotypical heroes in melodramas, Raoul demonstrates a morally strong hero who fails to rescue the heroine and possesses flaws in his personality and actions. At the beginning of the story, he appears with attractive appearance and gentlemanlike manners, and demonstrates his courage. However, despite his eagerness and attempts, the flaws in his personality emerge as the story progresses, ironically leading to the doubt of whether Raoul truly fulfill his duty as a hero able to rescue the heroine and other characters. In this stance, the portrayal of Raoul opposes the idea of the traditional heroes in melodramas, as his role as a hero remains superficial and powerless till the end. The hero of this film is indeed discredited and disempowered. Nonetheless, Raoul is still different from the Phantom as a hero. Although it is flawed in his attitude towards the females, his intention is good for everyone. He does not give direct orders in an autocratic way, but he acts as an adviser to those females who are still struggling, making them notice what the good consequences their actions can bring to the society. Besides, he maintains his reputation of a noble aristocrat throughout the whole story, showing his kindness and respect to the people around him,



which is different from the Phantom who just shows hostility to others. In this case, he deserves the name of hero in the story, despite all his flaws and vulnerabilities that render him less powerful.

In conclusion, *The Phantom of the Opera* (2004) reflects the complexity the human nature when it replaces the characterization of the supposedly one-sided stock characters in this melodrama with a rather multi-dimensional and fully-developed one. In this film, all the three main characters have subverted the melodramatic traditions. The Phantom is no more a traditional pure villain and Christine is no more a stereotypical damsel in distress. Even Raoul is no more a typical hero who is supposed to be powerful and influential in the film. They have all shown the more realistic and less archetypal sides in their portrayals, which transcends the melodramatic formulas in terms of characterization.



## CHAPTER THREE

### INNOVATIVE PLOT ARRANGEMENT

As unconventional as the characterization, the plot of modern melodramas also breaks the boundaries of the traditional plot arrangement. The conventional plot in melodramas typically follows a predictable and formulaic structure that is designed to evoke strong emotions and deliver moral messages to the audience. The pattern of the plot basically revolves around a central conflict between the hero, the heroine, and the villain (Smith 15). During the climax of the plot, the hero and the villain face off in a final showdown which often involves a physical confrontation or a dramatic revelation. In the ending, the hero and heroine emerge victorious, the villain is defeated and punished, and the conflicts are resolved (Smith 15). The powerfulness of virtues against evilness is asserted in the ending (Smith 15). Besides, the villain is often “endowed with a malevolence more than human, a motiveless malignity which sends shivers of irrational terror down the spine,” emphasizing his pure evilness more effectively (Smith 20). Moreover, the plot in melodramas is always filled with implausible events that are unlikely to happen in reality, so as to heighten the audience’s emotions and elicit strong emotional response from them. These implausible events are typically highly exaggerated or unrealistic, and they can include things like miraculous rescues, sudden plot twists, and dramatic revelation. They sometimes render the plot with devastating logic.

*The Phantom of the Opera* (2004) attempts to follow Aristotle’s suggestion of making the impossible plausible in literary works by justifying the implausible events to avoid devastating logic, by arranging some additional events that serve as the explanation into the plot, which makes the implausible events less coincidental. Furthermore, two scenes, “Music of the Night” and “All I Ask of You,” are arranged during the rising actions of the film to portray

the clear distinction and contrast of the two kinds of love found in the Phantom and Raoul, revealing the diversity of human nature in the perspective of love. Lastly, in the ending scene, the film does not follow the conventional ending of melodramas, in which the villain must be punished so as to emphasize the triumph of the virtues; instead, it challenges the tradition with a “happy ending” that everyone, even the villain, can be rewarded for their actions and decisions at the end. All these plot rewrites of *The Phantom of the Opera* unveil the screenwriters’ endeavors to go beyond the traditions of melodramas of being single-sided, so as to create a melodrama overcoming its limitations in plot arrangement, and thereby create an emotionally impactful story that resonates with audience in the perspective of sympathy, love and forgiveness.

### **The Plausible Impossibilities in *The Phantom of the Opera***

There are three main implausible events in the film: The existence of the Phantom under the opera house; the Phantom, who is a musical genius, approaches Christine by disguising himself as the Angel of Music told by her deceased father; and the reunion of Christine and Raoul. For the existence of the Phantom, it is somehow miraculous to have someone reside in the underground, and survive even being isolated from the world. His existence as a ghost story at the beginning of the story can also arouse the audience’s strong curiosity and fear. Meanwhile, it is dramatic and coincidental for the Phantom who has remarkable musical talents, able to approach Christine easily, due to a tale that Christine’s father told her when she was small. Their encounter would end differently, if the Phantom does not happen to be a musical genius at that time. As for the reunion of Christine and Raoul, it is too sudden that Raoul becomes the patron of the opera house and appears exactly at the time that Christine has the first opportunity to sing on stage, given that they actually have been departed since

they were small. Although these events are all significant for the story to progress, they appear to be too coincidental and implausible in the film.

In regard to the first implausible event about the existence of the Phantom living underground and becoming a murderous villain in the film, the screenwriters of *The Phantom of the Opera* (2004), Schumacher and Lloyd Webber, aim at justifying such to make it work-internally probable by arranging the scenes of the Phantom bringing Christine to his lair and Madame Giry's confidence about taking in the Phantom. Throughout the plot, the audience will notice the implausibility of the Phantom and his underground lair. At the beginning of the film, everyone including the audience, regards the "strange affair of the Phantom of the Opera" as "a mystery never fully explained", which is the first description of the Phantom given by the auctioneer (5). The Ballet girls and the stagehand Buquet also laugh at the story of a horrible Phantom, revealing their disbelief of such an implausibility (40). Further, Raoul explicitly claims that the Phantom of the Opera is just a fable (67). Without the scene where the Phantom appears in front of Christine and shows her his lair, the audience will also regard it as a fable like everyone else in the film, as they have not witnessed the existence of the Phantom in person. But now, the scene of the Phantom truly shows up in front of Christine, and at the same time the Phantom reveals his true identity as a mortal man in front of the audience, similar to what Raoul indicates later, "*he [is] nothing but a man*" (91). His existence is now beyond an imaginary character in a tale.

To further enhance the credibility and possibility of this implausible event, Schumacher and Lloyd Webber then arrange the confidence of Madame Giry, which reveals the background story of the Phantom and the reason for his residence under the opera house. It is said that the Phantom is a mysterious ghost who lives under the opera house, and has control of the theatre. Later, he is further portrayed as a violent villain who is obsessed with the virtuous

heroine and kills an innocent man as if this is the only solution to him being witnessed. Apart from his affection towards Christine, the audience has no understanding of him and his thoughts. Before the revelation scene, it is not explained why the Phantom, an immoral man, can kill a person without any hesitation. Such mystery maintains until the revelation scene, where the background story of the Phantom has been told by Madame Giry. In her story, she firstly describes where she finds the Phantom, a Gypsies travelling fair, that is described as “grotesque” and “nightmare”, suggesting the distressing and unpleasant conditions of the environment that the Phantom lived when he was still a child (82). Madame Giry also describes the young Phantom’s owner as “vicious” and “disgusting”, which implies his possible maltreatment of the Phantom (82). The following scene that manifests the suffering of the Phantom from his abusive owner exemplifies such implication and arouses the audience’s sympathy successfully:

The OWNER cracks his whip and is shouting at the BOY through the cage. The BOY is tied by ropes like a dog. He is obviously terrified, scrambling into the corner of his cage. The OWNER, letting fly with the whip, has entered the cage. He kicks the BOY’s model and rips the sack off his head ... Pathetically, the BOY’s hands descend from his face. We do not see it. Instead, we see a look of shock and immense pity on YOUNG GIRY’s face. Some of the BALLET GIRLS are giggling insensitively. (82-83)

What happens next is that the young Phantom murders his owner, which frees him from being abused. This scene thereby arouses sympathy towards the Phantom from Madame Giry and provides more information about the Phantom at the same time. Madame Giry’s sympathy then further elicits the same emotion from the audience, who witnesses the suffering of the Phantom and the compassionate expression of Madame Giry. The emotions of the audience

change from curiosity and fear into sympathy. The violent and merciless Phantom becomes more sympathetic here due to his suffering when he was small. The young Phantom is being whipped by a seem-to-be more villainous gypsy; the people all around him, except for young Girya, enjoy watching his suffering and offer no helping hand to him. This is such a cruel world with no pity, as the Phantom indicates later, “[t]he world showed no compassion to [him]” (103). Eventually, the young Phantom found that the only way to be free is through violence and murder. He realizes the power of violence and regards it as an effective method to achieve his purposes and solutions to settle his problems. In such case, it is understandable that his mind and morality are then twisted wrongly after escaping successfully from his abuser, and also more reasonable for why he can easily commit murder again later. Moreover, the residence of the Phantom underneath the opera house has also been explained, as it is Madame Girya who hides him there. Afterwards, with his talents, the Phantom builds his underground kingdom and manipulates the theatre with his tricks too. As a result, by giving the solid background of the Phantom, the development of the Phantom’s personality and thoughts becomes probable within the text, at the same time revealing the complexity of human nature within this character—people do not become villains without reason. In the Phantom’s case, he is wronged by the people in the society, which turns him into a villain that is full of hatred to the world. Therefore, his evilness is explainable with reasons, which is different from the traditional villain that gives the audience irrational terror. Due to the enhanced credibility of his existence, the audience can find an intrinsic reality in it. With such intrinsic and realistic element in the portrayal of the Phantom, the audience tends to be more sympathetic to a person that they can resonate with easier. The Phantom’s existence is no more simply an implausible event that can be found in traditional melodramas; it becomes a plausible impossibility.

In the film, the backstory of the Phantom is an intentional plot rewrite in the purpose of making the character more sympathetic and gives the audience a better understanding of the villain's motivations, rendering him less one-sided. As a result, the villain does not become simply dangerous and violent for the sake of being evil: his extreme violence is the consequence of him being a victim of abuse and neglect. By arranging the scene of Madame Girya revealing her history with the Phantom, the existence of the Phantom and the development of his characterization become more justifiable in the film version. This is a new scene that is only included in the film, not in both the novel and the musical versions. In the novel, the Phantom's history is not told by Madame Girya, and their relationship is just reciprocity (Leroux 212-213). They do not have any deep connections in heart. Meanwhile in the musical, it is Madame Girya who tells Raoul the history of Phantom, but she is not his rescuer (Lloyd Webber et al. 61-62). She only serves for the purpose of revealing the talents and history of the Phantom in the scene of her confidence, nothing more. As for the film, it extends not only the backstory of the Phantom, but also the relationship between the Phantom and Madame Girya in the new plot rewrite. With this new plot rewrite, the Phantom is portrayed as a victim that needs to be rescued. Madame Girya's compassion and empathy for him elicit the same emotions from the audience. The screenwriters rewrite the Phantom and the plot in a more sympathetic light, at the same time shortens the distance between the Phantom and the audience. The plot of this film thereby becomes more realistic and sympathetic to the audience. It is no longer full of coincidences and the audience is able to understand the multifaceted villain more. This allows for a more nuanced exploration of human behavior and motivations, and can make the story more relatable and engaging for the audience.

Nevertheless, the other two implausible events, i.e. the Phantom appears to be the Angel of Music told by Christine's father and the reunion of the two childhood sweethearts, remain unexplained in the film. Yet, such negligence of explanations is essential for the plot development of the film. In her research, Marie-Laure Ryan suggests a compromise between the faulty logic of this kind of implausible events and their subjective judgement as good or bad: by admitting their flaws, but at the same time, recognizing these events if they are being put in the service of a good story (57). For the two unexplained implausible events in the film, they have their own roles to contribute to the characterization and plot development necessarily. Regarding the case of the Phantom becoming the Angel of Music, in the original novel, it is Christine who takes the initiative to ask the Phantom whether he is the Angel of Music, and the Phantom affirms her. However, in the film, Christine only tells the story that she hears the voice of the Phantom, and does not reveal if she has asked the Phantom for his identity or she just assumes him as the Angel without asking. Such arrangement heightens the sense of mystery of the Phantom; at the same time, it shows how naive and undefended to strangers that Christine is, before her maturing. She is too easily subject to her suffering in losing her father and her longing for fatherly love, rendering her undoubting about the intention of the Phantom's approach. Although this plot rewrite seems to undermine the credibility of how the Phantom becomes the Angel of Music and to make it more dramatic, it is essential to the purpose of the film of demonstrating the growth in the heroine, by showing that: the naiver and more immature Christine was before the ending, the larger growth she has experienced till the end of the story. Consequently, it can impress the audience with her large personal growth and heighten the satisfaction of witnessing it.

As for the reunion of Christine and Raoul, in the original novel, Raoul is only one of the audiences during Christine's first performance on stage as a leading actress; whereas in



the film, Raoul becomes the new patron of the opera house right before Christine's performance. Such rewrite provides grounds for Raoul to have more valid intervention of Christine and also the opera house. For instance, he can enter the opera house and attend all the necessary events held there; he can also join the meeting with the opera managers and discuss how to capture the Phantom. Thus, Raoul is allowed to have more interactions with other characters for his characterization, and guaranteed with more opportunities for him to save people as a hero, no matter he succeeds or not. Even though Raoul becoming the patron is a sudden arrangement of the plot, it is significant in allowing the audience having more understanding of the characterization of this unusual hero, from how he attempts to solve the problem and also his way of interactions with the people inside the opera house. In this case, in light of Ryan's idea of compromising the implausible events as long as they are essential for the story, the flawed logic of these two implausible events can be compromised, as they are all crucial for advancing the plot and portraying the unique characters in the film.

### **The Love in "Music of the Night" and "All I Ask of You"**

By arranging the two scenes of "Music of the Night" and "All I Ask of You" in the middle of the plot,<sup>10</sup> the film elicits two different types of love that can be found in multi-sided human nature—a conditional possessive love focusing on subconscious desire and unconditional compassionate love focusing on mutual trust, arousing both strong romantic and erotic feelings from the audience for these scenes. The Phantom's attitude towards love, which is represented by his solo song "Music of the Night," is precisely unveiled in the former scene. His idea of love emphasizes his ownership and control of the one he loves. The lyrics of his solo convey how much the Phantom wants to possess Christine for his own benefits and treats her as his belonging, when he sings, "[s]ince the moment I first heard you sing,

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<sup>10</sup> The musical version also has the same plot arrangement as the film.

I have needed you with me, to serve me, to sing, for my music...” (36). Only Christine can be his muse that inspires him in creating his music of the night (38). In other words, the love of the Phantom to Christine is in fact conditional, as his love for her carries a precondition that Christine is worthy for his music. In this case, the Phantom cannot tolerate the possibility of Christine leaving him. In order to prevent it from happening, he seduces her in this scene by focusing on the subconscious sensual pleasure and desire he can give her, and then tempts her to surrender to sensual temptations and leaves the mundane reality, so that he can completely own her and keep her underground with him. Therefore, the song mainly delves into the subconscious, exploring the temptation of sensual pleasure that can be found in dark nights.

Both the performance of the characters and the lyrics depict a vivid picture of a seductive and immersive experience, where the senses are heightened, and desires are unleashed without inhibition. At the beginning of the scene, Christine has already entered the realm of subconsciousness, as stated in the script, being “[m]ersmerized and hypnotized” by the “stunning, sexual master,” who is the Phantom (37). Besides, the image of darkness is constantly used in the song “Music of the Night”, symbolizing the subconsciousness of the human mind. The song also begins with the description of the power of the nightfall, as “*Night-time sharpens, heightens each / sensation... Darkness stirs and / wakes imagination... Silently the / senses abandon their defences...*” (37). The darkness here is personified as if it is a tantalizing siren that stirs the imagination and invites the listener to abandon their defenses. The night, therefore, becomes a mysterious and alluring force, implying the sensual pleasures that lie ahead as a seduction for Christine to stay. The use of sensory languages, such as “caress”, “hear”, and “feel,” also reinforces the sensual nature of the song, delineating the immersive experience of temptation (37). Furthermore, the way that the Phantom tempts Christine to turn away from the “garish light of day” and the “cold, unfeeling light” serves as the temptation to

escape from the constraints of societal norms and embrace the sensual pleasure that the subconscious mind will bring (37). Being urged to embrace the darkness of the night and thus her hidden desire and imagination, Christine is further tempted to abandon the mundane conscious life. Moreover, it implies a sense of danger in the subconsciousness when it is inhibited and free from the social constraints. If Christine submits herself to such uncontrolled subconscious desire like the Phantom, she will be rejected by the society too, and becomes a heroine with distorted personality.

Overall, the tone of this song is dark and mysterious which reflects the personality of the Phantom and his seduction being dangerous. Rich and operatic, the music is also dynamic in tempo and intensity, with the singer changing between tender and powerful vocalizations, delivering different emotions from softness to passion to desperation. The listener can especially notice the singer's emphasis on sexual phrases like "touch me", "trust me" and "feel it", stressing the sensual and tempting nature of the song. The format of this song as a solo song suggests the love of the Phantom is rather one-sided, as he aims to possess Christine by tempting her to stay for the satisfaction of sensual pleasure and desire, instead of loving him.

On the other hand, the scene of "All I Ask of You" delineates an entire contrast of love from that of "Music of the Night". This duet highlights the power of unconditional compassionate love between Christine and Raoul with mutual trust, and their longing for life-long companionship. Raoul demonstrates his eagerness to protect his lover Christine from the darkness. The darkness implies dangers and threats that are represented by the Phantom and his temptations, while the light implies peace and safety that are represented by Raoul and his pure love in the lyrics. Raoul refers to "darkness" as "wide-eyed fears", claiming that "daylight" can dry her tears and his words will "warm" Christine (68). Christine also longs for "a world with no more night", manifesting night as the metaphor for dangers (69). She also asks

Raoul to “*turn [her] head with talk of summertime*”, in which summertime also symbolizes warmth and light (69). Raoul then further asserts to Christine that he will be her “shelter” and “light” that can protect her safely from fears (69). In this song, the symbols of light and night are frequently used, implying that the power of mutual love can bring warm light that protects lovers from the bleak night. Their love for each other brings them comfort, strength, and hope.

Moreover, the song also emphasizes the companionship of lovers in both difficult times and peaceful times. Lyrics such as “[s]ay you need me with you here, / beside you... anywhere you go... / let me go too” and “[s]hare each day with me, each night, each morning...” stresses the importance to have someone to lean on during difficult times, as lovers do not only share happiness, but they stand by each other’s side through thick and thin (69-70). The music of “All I Ask of You” is melodic and romantic, with breathtaking orchestration that heightens the emotions of the lyrics gradually. As a duet, this song depicts a heartfelt interplay between Raoul and Christine’s voices, implying their unity and harmonious relationship as lovers. In this case, the melody and harmonies of the song create a heartwarming atmosphere that complements the message of mutual love and companionship.

Notably, the screenwriters arrange the Phantom’s witness during the scene of “All I Ask of You”, in which his vengeful statement towards the lovers hints at another perspective of his attitude of love—conditional love, a contrast of the unconditional love of Raoul and Christine. After watching the lovers’ kisses and listening to their duets, the Phantom bewails: “*I gave you my music... made your / song take wing... And now, how / you've repaid me: denied me and / betrayed me... He was bound to / love you when he heard you sing... / Christine...*” (71). Throughout the film, his love for Christine is delineated as possessive and obsessive, driven by his desire for her to perform his music and be his muse. He believes that

Christine is his creation, and everything she has is owed to him. The aforementioned lyrics show the Phantom's disappointment and anger towards Christine's rejection of him, even though he gives her his music and develops her singing talent. In return, Christine denies and betrays him.

The Phantom believes that Christine uses him to take advantage of him, and he is unable to get what he wants from her in return. Such conditional love is one of the symptoms of "Nice Guy Syndrome". The syndrome represents "a belief that if Nice Guys are 'good,' they will be loved, get their needs met, and live a problem-free life" (Glover 5). According to Robert A. Glover, one of the characteristics of the Nice Guys are being givers and expecting reciprocation (Glover 11, 13). If they fail to receive what they expect, they will feel "frustrated or resentful as a result of giving so much while seemingly getting so little in return" (Glover 13). In light of the syndrome, the Phantom demonstrates indeed a Nice Guy who requires an appreciation for his giving to Christine. When he witnesses the lifelong commitment of Raoul and Christine, he realizes that Christine will no longer become his muse and stay with him. He fails to control and own Christine as his possession anymore. Consequently, he loses control of his rage and he curses the two lovers, as they "*did not do all that the Phantom asked of [them]*" (71). This again exemplifies the conditional love of the Phantom, the Nice Guy, as he does not receive what he expects from Christine and blames Raoul for taking Christine away from him. In essence, in this scene, the two types of love that the Phantom and Raoul portray are distinct from each other as they reveal two different sides of human nature—the conditional self with personal wants and the unconditional openness of heart. The former gives generous love with calculations of receiving returns, whereas the latter is satisfied with the loved one's existence and accepts that person without reservations.

Different from the novel version, both the film and musical versions utilizes the power of music to enhance the emotions delivered from the two love confessions, emphasizing the sharp contrast of two kinds of love that can be found within the Phantom and Raoul. In the novel, there is also a rooftop scene in Chapter Twelve, in which Christine mainly tells Raoul her story of being kidnapped by the Phantom to his underground lair, with little love confessions from the two lovers. Instead of sweet talk between lovers, Raoul demonstrates his jealousy towards the unique relationship between Christine and the Phantom:

“Oh, I hate him!” cried Raoul. “And you, Christine, tell me, do you hate him too?”

“No,” said Christine simply.

“No, of course not ... Why, you love him! Your fear, your terror, all of that is just love and love of the most exquisite kind, the kind which people do not admit even to themselves,” said Raoul bitterly. “The kind that gives you a thrill, when you think of it...

Picture it: a man who lives in a palace underground!” And he gave a leer. (Leroux 165)

In this short passage from the novel, Raoul is not portrayed as a flawless Prince Charming, but someone who is also jealous and childish towards the one he loves. He is not as gentle and noble as the Raoul in the film. The rewrite and the plot arrangement of this scene in the film, in fact, aims at highlighting the danger in the Phantom’s love, and dramatically escalating the conflict between the two kinds of love mentioned earlier.

The scene of “Music of the Night” takes place earlier than that of “All I Ask of You”, and before the Phantom’s murder of the innocent stagehand. In this scene, Christine still regards the Phantom as her teacher, guardian, and her deepest sexual desire; the audience is also immersed in the Phantom’s powerful and striking performance and singing. The way that the Phantom seduces Christine to unleash her subconscious desire freely without controlling them

makes the audience wavers with Christine whether to submit or not. Yet, the murder that the Phantom commits reveals the true danger that lies within the unconstrained subconscious desire. Both Christine and the audience then realize what horrible consequence the Phantom's love can bring if they submit to his seduction entirely—they will become another Phantom who is immoral, radical, and distorted. After the murder, the scene of “All I Ask of You” immediately takes place, providing a safe zone for both Christine and the audience to organize their thoughts and take a break from the horror they have just experienced. Being frightened by the murder, Christine eventually realizes what is the better love for her, that is, the unconditional compassionate love with mutual trust represented by Raoul. As a result of such plot arrangement, the contrast between the two loves becomes more obvious and persuasive for the audience, and the screenwriters thereby deliver their idea of ideal love in this film successfully.

### **A Transcending Ending in Melodrama**

A melodrama's conventional conclusion usually sees the resolution of the main conflict and the restoration of order and justice to the plot's society. Typically, it features a pivotal showdown between the hero and the villain, in which the former prevails and the latter needs to be punished for their transgressions (Smith 15). As discussed, melodramas intend to instruct the morals of the audience on how to live a virtuous life or avoid the pitfalls of vice and temptation. The clear-cut moral dichotomy thereby creates a sense of moral clarity in traditional melodramas. However, the ending of *The Phantom of the Opera* (2004) does not follow such tradition, as it shows the possible redemption of a villain and tends to arouse the emotional ambiguity in the audience. The audience feels nervous and disappointed when seeing Raoul and Christine are both captured and threatened by the Phantom; then pity and sadness

take place when the Phantom is accepted by someone for the first time but he has to let the one he loves go.

As the villain in this melodrama, the Phantom is not only punished with his loss of Christine, but also rewarded with freedom and bravery to leave his prison of despair. He has cursed Christine for her denial and rejection in the scene of “All I Ask of You”. In the scene where the Phantom kidnaps Christine and threatens to kill Raoul, Christine expresses her resentment against the Phantom for his soul “*that the true distortion lies*” (102). All this time, the Phantom regards his deformity as the reason why people hate him the most, but he ignores the significance of morality and virtues in his heart. Now, his twisted understanding of the world finally meets the opportunity to straighten up with his recognition of his true flaws. Unfortunately, the arrival of Raoul arouses his rage again. His intrinsic goodness is thereby subdued by evil again. Later, Christine once again asserts her hatred towards the Phantom: “*The tears I might have shed for your dark fate grow cold and turn to tears of hate...*” (104). This marks the beginning of the Phantom’s punishment for his misdeeds, as the heart of Christine leaves him farther and farther away. However, Christine still chooses to give the Phantom a kiss out of sympathy, subtle love, and with a final hope that it will move the Phantom to release them. Eventually, she succeeds in convincing the Phantom to believe the goodness in people once again and free them from his dungeon. Knowing that choosing Raoul will be a more acceptable choice to both herself and the society, she leaves with Raoul after she returns the ring to the Phantom. This is also a part of the punishment of the Phantom, as what he wants the most is Christine’s companionship for a lifetime. But now, he can only suffer from her leaving forever.

On the other hand, the Phantom is rewarded by showing his forgiveness to the world and goodness in releasing Christine and Raoul at the end with his true freedom from the hell



that confines him for a long time. Before his redemption of freeing the heroine and hero, he is constantly being portrayed as having possessive love towards the heroine and regarding her as his belonging. His obsession towards Christine is reflected throughout the whole story, in his attempts in controlling her to stay underground with him. He has never asked for Christine's preferences and willingness of all his plans about her, e.g. taking her to the underground lair, making her the leading actress by threatening the opera managers, etc. He imposes his will on Christine, without respecting and trusting her decisions. Thus, when the Phantom chooses to let Christine and Raoul go, it indicates his understanding of what true love is—mutual respect and trust without any conditions. True love does not confine the one he loves by his side, but to free her from his own control. Eventually, the Phantom shows his compassionate side and redeems for the mistakes that he has made in the story.

In the film, the Phantom's redemption is rewarded with bravery and freedom that liberates him from his underground prison, past suffering and insecurity. Before his redemption, the Phantom has revealed his true feelings towards his lair for once in the following lyrics sung near the ending: "*Down once more to the dungeons of my black despair! Down we plunge to the prison of my mind! Down that path into darkness, deep as hell!*" (98-99). The Phantom regards the underground lair not only as a kingdom full of his designs and creations, but also the chain that restraints and isolates him from the daylight and society since he was small. Nevertheless, the Phantom also subconsciously regards it as a shelter to protect him from the malice of the people outside and prevent him from being ridiculed and abused again. In the end, the Phantom disappears from the lair after letting Christine and Raoul go, and no one is able to find him, symbolizing his forgiveness and reconciliation with the people who had once abused him—he does not need the shelter to have him hidden from the world anymore. After Christine's death, Raoul even discovers that the Phantom has placed a single rose

with a black ribbon at Christine's monument, implying that the Phantom is still alive after all these years. Despite the crime he has committed, his ultimate redemption demonstrated his goodness inside. His redemption of letting go of Christine and Raoul even renders him heroic, instead of a pure villain. Since virtues must be rewarded in a melodrama, he gains the freedom to live a new life and the bravery to leave his lair. In this case, the conflicts of the story are resolved in an unusual and complex way in the ending.

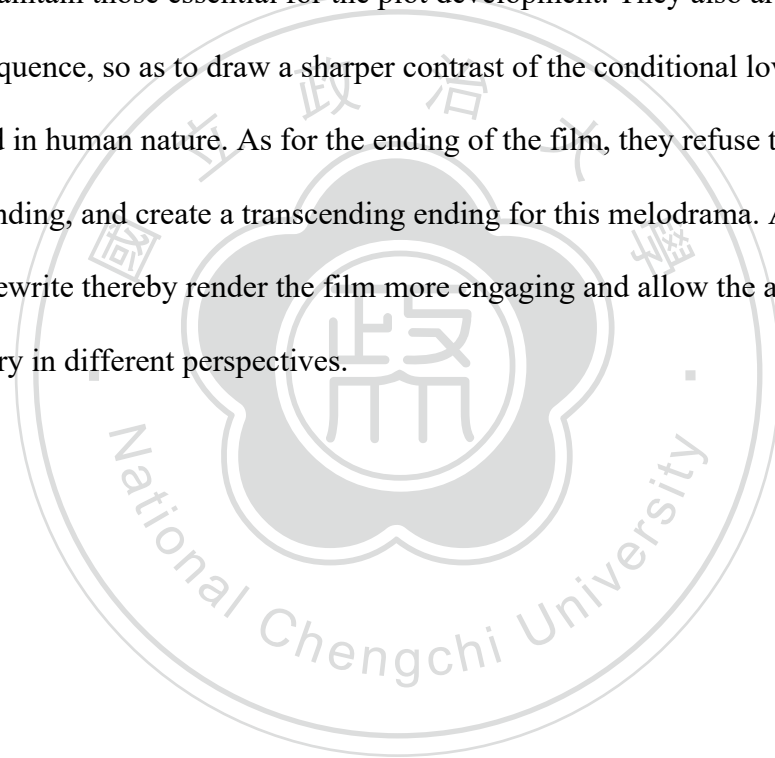
Portraying the Phantom as a villain at the beginning and somehow a hero at the end, the film gives a provocative plot rewrite regarding the ending, which is different from the novel and the musical. The novel tends to follow the melodramatic plot, in which the villain is punished without any excuses or new possibilities. In the novel, the Phantom dies soon after his release of Christine and Raoul. As the Phantom commits murder in the story, it seems to be reasonable for him to redeem his crime with his life. This is common for the melodramatic plot to illustrate the ending that a villain often deserves, and it also attempts to incite extreme emotion of the audience in the extreme circumstance of his death. As in the musical version, the Phantom flees successfully, but there is no extension scene of his current situation after everything ends. It is left unexplained and creates a sense of suspense in the audience. In this instance, the newly added scene of Raoul discovering the fresh rose at Christine's monument in the film indeed breaks the conventional melodramatic tropes and expectations, as the villain can also be rewarded with freedom and long life-span due to his final decisions and long-lasting selfless love till the very end of the story. Meanwhile, it also challenges the audience to consider the characters and their decisions critically and leaves them with a sense of emotional ambiguity and complexity that is uncommon for melodramas, unveiling a new way of portrayal of the melodramatic plot.

Besides, compared with the one in the novel version, the kiss in the ending scene in the film echoes with the complexity of love in human nature, at the same time heightens the emotions of the audience. In the novel, the Phantom kisses Christine on her forehead first, and Christine returns a forehead kiss after the Phantom releases Raoul and let them go. A forehead kiss does not only mean love. In this scenario, it can symbolize the Phantom's affection to Christine, and Christine's compassion and caring to the Phantom. Especially when Christine does not take the initiative to kiss the Phantom before he releases them, her kiss tends to be a reward of the Phantom's final decision.

Meanwhile, in the film and musical, they have the same rewrite of the kiss on lips between the Phantom and Christine, which underscores the complexity of love in the story. The kiss on lips symbolizes intimacy in general. The Phantom's love for Christine's love is obsessive and possessive, but it is also driven by a deep sense of loneliness and longing. But Christine's love for the Phantom is more ambiguous, as she is torn between her feelings for him and her loyalty to Raoul. Apart from Christine's sympathy and compassion towards the Phantom, the kiss also represents a moment of understanding and empathy between the two characters, even as they acknowledge that they cannot be together. Furthermore, when Christine takes the initiative to kiss the Phantom on lips, it symbolizes her full commitment and sacrifice, showing her maturing and virtues as the true hero at the same time. Ultimately, their kiss draws an ending of their relationship and also heightens the audience's emotions as a moment of emotional release from pity with tears. All in all, the rewrite of the ending in the film provide a more nuanced plot by combining newly-added elements that are different from the novel version. Villains are no more subjected to punishment. They are able to be rewarded if they redeem for their evil behavior. Besides, the ending also illustrates another perspective of love—loyalty to one's lover and letting go the one that does not love you. The screenwriters

are able to create a new story with diversity of human nature delineated to the audience, and the audience thereby resonates with the story more.

In a nutshell, *The Phantom of the Opera* (2004) not only utilizes the melodramatic traditions in plot arrangement, i.e. the implausible events, but also provides innovative rewrites that transcend the traditions, expressing the complex reality of human nature in a dramatic form. The screenwriters attempt to enhance the creditability of certain implausible event, at the same time maintain those essential for the plot development. They also arrange scenes with intended sequence, so as to draw a sharper contrast of the conditional love and unconditional love found in human nature. As for the ending of the film, they refuse to follow the traditional happy ending, and create a transcending ending for this melodrama. All of these arrangement and rewrite thereby render the film more engaging and allow the audience to resonate with the story in different perspectives.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### CONCLUSION

“So it is that recognition of melodrama’s pervasive presence in our representations and our thought may be useful in the recognition of what we have to deal with, and what—in all its limitations—we most often have at hand for dealing with it”

— Peter Brooks in *The Melodramatic Imagination*

Produced and co-written by Andrew Lloyd Webber and directed by Joel Schumacher, the film version of *The Phantom of the Opera* (2004) not only provides an extended perspective of Lloyd Webber’s story rewrite based on the original novel, but also puts melodramas in a new light. Many scholars belittled melodrama as a lowbrow entertainment, but they overlooked its flexibility and possibility of adapting to the changes in society. This thesis notices the evolution of melodramas till nowadays, and thus aims to investigate how modern melodramas differ themselves from the traditional, making them worthier for scholarly study as a respectable literary genre. Focusing on the 2004 film adaptation of *The Phantom of the Opera*, I argue that this modern melodrama justifies itself as a respectable and valuable literary artwork, given its transcending characterization and plot rewrite that refuse to comply with every tradition of melodramas. The film’s complex characters and innovative plot have demonstrated a departure from the simplistic, one-dimensional characters and conventional plot arrangement that are often associated with traditional melodramas.

Through the examination of the characterization of the main protagonists, the Phantom, Christine, and Raoul, it is clear that they are not mere caricatures or archetypes, but rather fully fleshed-out characters with complex motivations, desires, and flaws. The Phantom, as

the villain of the film, has been portrayed as a more complex villain rather than a traditional melodramatic villain. He possesses some typical villainous characteristics like being manipulative, possessive to the heroine, and impulsive. But his vulnerabilities are also revealed in the film, which is an uncommon characterization in terms of melodramatic villains. At the end of the film, he even becomes a “tragic” hero<sup>11</sup> with his hamartia and downfall. As for the heroine Christine, she successfully shakes off the stereotype of a vulnerable damsel in distress as the story progresses. Although she is innocent and naïve at the beginning of the story, she is able to demonstrate individual thinking and bravery to take the initiative of facing the villain in the ending scene, indicating her personal growth and mental maturing. Being vulnerable and powerless, Raoul does not fulfill his duties as a hero perfectly in the film. Meanwhile, he shows the real sides of an ordinary man; that is, every man, even the hero, has his own flaws. In Raoul’s case, despite being handsome and courageous like other traditional melodramatic heroes, he is also impulsive and overconfident, which often leads to his failure to rescue others. His desire of manipulating females is also implied in the film, rendering him more oppressive to the heroine and other female characters.

Similarly, the plot arrangement of the film version is not limited to the predictable melodramatic storylines filled with implausible events. Instead, it is a more nuanced narrative that explores the complexities of human emotions and relationships. The innovative rewrite of the plot also allows the audience to resonate with the story, inciting extreme emotions, e.g. sadness and fear, from them. Schumacher and Lloyd Webber attempt to enhance the creditability and possibility of the implausible events of the film, especially the existence and development of the Phantom, by adding the scene where Madame Giry reveals her relationship with the

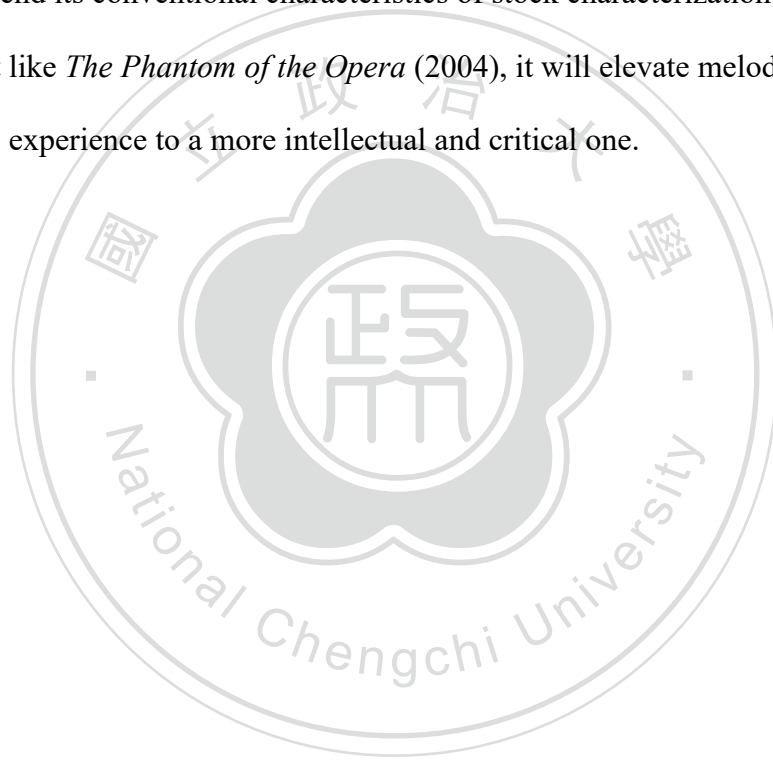
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<sup>11</sup> The term “tragic hero” used here is based on common sensical understanding, instead of the one originated from Aristotle’s theory.

Phantom. However, it seems that other implausible events, like Raoul becoming the patron of the opera theatre, are still essential for the plot arrangement of this melodrama. The new arrangement of the scenes of “Music of the Night” and “All I Ask of You” also draws a clear contrast between two kinds of love that can be found in human nature—one conditional and the other unconditional. The screenwriters also utilize the arrangement of these two scenes to warn the audience about the danger of the Phantom’s conditional love and compliment the unconditional compassionate love between Christine and Raoul as the ideal. Last but not least, Schumacher and Lloyd Webber provide a new possibility of the ending of *The Phantom of the Opera*, which shows its transcendence of the traditional ending in melodramas—it depicts a villain’s redemption instead of only punishment. Granted an opportunity to get rid of his identity as a villain, the Phantom is no longer a simplistic villain. He is punished, but also rewarded for his final decision of freeing everyone from his control. All these plot arrangements exemplify how this film attempts to go beyond the traditional boundaries and limitations of melodramas through its plot rewrite. They reflect not only the new possibilities of melodramas, but also that of human nature.

The 2004 film adaptation of *The Phantom of the Opera* is a modern melodrama that transcends the limits of traditional melodramatic conventions, with its complex characters and creative plot rewrite. The film’s enduring popularity and continued influence on popular culture is a testament to its timeless appeal and its status as a classic melodrama in cinema. It has proven to be a successful adaptation that effectively captures the spirit and essence of the original source material, while also introducing new melodramatic elements and perspectives that make it a unique and compelling work. In other words, what is important in this transcendence of melodrama is that, it is able to improve the shortcomings and transcend the limitations of traditional melodramas according to market needs and changes of universal value,

at the same time retain the pureness and strengths of melodramas. Nowadays, melodramatic elements are extensively used in different films and dramas, which further proves the adaptability and flexibility of these elements. They can be used to explore a wider range of themes and issues, such as mental health, race, and gender identity, that reflect the realities of contemporary society. In fact, this is what the melodrama has been purposing for all this time, to portray the real side of society in an entertaining way that captivates the audience. If a melodrama can transcend its conventional characteristics of stock characterization and formulaic plot arrangement like *The Phantom of the Opera* (2004), it will elevate melodrama from a purely emotional experience to a more intellectual and critical one.





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