Re:Adapted – The Phantoms of the Opera

1. Introduction and Gaston Leroux

Hello, and welcome to the first episode of the first season of Re:Adapted. I'm your host, Kris 'Pepper' Hambrick, and this season we'll be discussing the many iterations of Gaston Leroux's 1911 novel, *The Phantom of the Opera.* Depending on your age, genres of choice, and level of interest, you might know this as Andrew Lloyd Webber's Phantom of the Opera, or you might conjure up visions of Lon Chaney's famous makeup. And we'll get to all of them. Because that's what this podcast is about--the way that we, as a culture, grab onto certain characters and stories and insist on retelling them over, and over, and over.

Some content warnings for the following episodes: there is some ableism inherent in all of the works we'll be discussing this season, as well as the general social bias against ugliness. There is also some stalking and generally bad boyfriend behavior, as well as period-typical racism.

I've always been fascinated by our impulse to retell the same stories, partly because I like a lot of those stories, but partly because I think that the way we choose to tell them, and the differences between the various versions, tell us a lot about ourselves and the eras in which those stories appear. So this podcast is going to focus on two basic questions: why do we feel the need to tell THIS story again, and what do the different adaptations tell us about our culture and history?

We're starting with Phantom because it's one I know a lot about, and have written about before. But through this podcast I hope to explore stories as varied as: Arthurian legend, Beauty and the Beast, A Christmas Carol, The Haunting of Hill House, I Am Legend, Jane Austen's ouvre, Jane Eyre, Les Miserables, Robin Hood, Sherlock Holmes, Dracula, and Treasure Island ... Just to

name a few. So before we get started with Phantom, a few notes about how this is going to go and what to expect.

This is not a podcast about how any one iteration is better or worse, including the book. Preferences and opinions are all valid, and while we may discuss qualitatively the artistic aspects of a movie's production and I'm obviously going to be biased, the point isn't to find the "right" version or the "most authentic." I hope to demonstrate through the course of this series that that question is far too blunt to really be useful--the point is that someone thought we needed the tenth version of something, not that their version sucks. I'm also going to talk about some of the technical complications involved in adapting and transferring works from one medium to another, because a lot of the time when a favorite book or play gets turned into a movie, we tend to focus on what was *left out* instead of looking at all the ways in which the creative team had to work to make the shift.

So for this season, we'll be looking at the movie *and* musical versions of Phantom of the Opera, including but not limited to: Lon Chaney, Claude Rains, Herbert Lom, Phantom of the Paradise, the Lloyd Webber musical and movie, the animated kids version, Charles Dance and the Yeston/Kopit musical, David Staller, Robert Englund, Julian Sands, and the greater fandom "movement" that has grown up around this story. Over the past hundred-plus years, I think it will become clear that this story has undergone a profound shift in context and meaning that mirrors societal perceptions of marriage, monstrosity, and sexuality, to name but a few. But first, for this episode, I'm going to go back into the novel as a recap for those who have read it and an introduction for those who haven't, so we know what plot points and characters we'll be working with. Or, you know, disregarding altogether. (*I* see you, daroga.)

One of the interesting things about Phantom--and I will be using "Phantom" as shorthand for the story as well as the character, but it should be clear in context--is that there is an argument to be made that the vast majority of adaptations are actually riffing off the *previous version or versions*, rather than going back to the

original novel. But I think we need a clear understanding of what that novel is and means in order to examine how it has--or hasn't--shown up in subsequent tellings.

The Phantom of the Opera was originally published as a serial in the French newspaper *Le Gaulois* in 1909, and for our purposes here published in an English language, collected form in 1911. While there is a lot of discussion and debate about the quality of the original Alexander de Mattos translation, citing among other things important deletions and modifications from the original French, for today this is the one we're going to focus on. The reason for that is that until quite recently, it was the *only* version available to most English speakers, including the people making the films and musicals and thus, this is the source material that concerns us, no matter how inaccurate later translators have found it. I think it's telling that even with these flaws, the story has the kind of universality that doesn't need to be perfect to be important.

The author, Gaston Leroux, probably deserves a podcast of his own. As a young man of some means but a greater capacity for a good time, he gambled away his fortune and became a journalist. As such, he traveled extensively and served in such varied positions as drama critic and courtroom reporter. Eventually, inspired in part by his love of English-language detective writers such as Edgar Allen Poe and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, he began writing detective fiction and had some success there before turning his attention to some strange events which had occurred at the Paris Opera and were ripe for fictional expansion. All of this background is significant, because it all plays into the *type* of novel Leroux ended up writing, which is simultaneously very much a thing of its time… and super weird.

I'm going to stop here and confess that I both love this book *and* think it has huge flaws. I don't think it's a literary work of genius in the traditional sense. But I *do* think that it's flawed in very particular ways that have, if anything, contributed to its success and our continued fascination with it. I think many of the works

that inspire repetition have something of this quality, most simply because they leave room for interpretation, iteration, and improvement. We like to play in the gaps, in the places left for us to create our own notions, and there's room in Leroux's novel for plenty of play.

Before we get to the plot, I want to talk about an aspect of the writing that has been both instrumental in its continued adaptation and never truly exploited in any of the subsequent versions. Leroux uses a device in his writing well known to anyone watching true crime dramas today: the insistence that everything he's about to tell you is true. The Phantom really existed, that he himself has seen not only the skeletal remains of Erik but found his hollow columns and trapdoor tricks, that in order to write this account he's done his homework and talked to all the people involved and tracked down retired ballerinas and Persian ex-pats. This is all highly effective, especially if you do a little more digging and find out that, yes, there *is* water under the opera and yes, there *was* a counterweight (if not an entire chandelier) that fell and aren't all theaters haunted anyway?

There are two obvious precursors I can think of. One is Bram Stoker's *Dracula*--the novel, not the 1992 movie, published in 1897—where evidence is presented largely in a series of letters. The epistolary novel is as old as the novel itself, but in *Dracula* the trope is utilized to make the reader feel not just the immediacy of the events but the creeping notion that the narrative has been cobbled together from actual documents. Closer to home were the works of Jules Verne, whose novels like 1872's *Around the World in Eighty Days* were also originally serialized, with extensive historical and scientific research, and sometimes even published to coincide with the actual dates in the story. So the appetite was there for fantastic stories the reader cannot prove *aren't* true.

Leroux goes a step further, inserting his own journalistic presence into the book and contending that it is made up of not just found documents but interviews with the relevant parties. This is, of

course, heightened by the fact that it originally appeared in serial form, *in* a newspaper, *by* an established reporter known for adventurous reporting and undercover scoops. Leroux constructs a linear narrative, but he does so while constantly telling you it's all true, and he bookends his tale with a first-person account of how he got the information and, finally, *how we should feel about it*.

While it is tempting to believe aspects of this story, of course *Phantom* is made up. Leroux's skill was perhaps not in his prose style, but in his ability to wrap his fantastic tale in mundane details and real-world settings. And that is one of the things that sets the Phantom himself apart and makes him hard to classify amongst the other movie 'monsters,' even as many of his outings might be shelved in the horror section. Leroux is very careful to tell a story of a *man*, a man with uncommon talents maybe but whose desires are all too common.

So what is that story, in brief? Well, we open with an opera in disarray: the ballet girls are nervous, the star is mysteriously ill, and a stagehand has been found murdered. Rumors of a ghost abound, there's a weird Persian guy hanging around who's probably up to no good (because racism), and in addition two new managers are taking over from their old counterparts, who are retiring due to the stress of… well, we'll see.

Despite the death, who was just a backstage guy anyway, the show must go on, and previously invisible chorus girl Christine Daae takes La Carlotta's place as prima donna. To everyone's astonishment, she's a ringer. Even the pretty young dude who's been coming to watch her every night is kinda surprised, so he goes to her dressing room to reveal he's been watching her and that they, in fact, know each other. His name is Raoul de Chagny, but she doesn't seem to remember him, and rejects his story about having run into the sea to rescue her scarf when they were children. Like all good obsessive teenagers in love, he lurks outside her dressing room door long enough to hear a man speaking to Christine when she had insisted on being alone. In

further proof he is good boyfriend material, he waits for her to leave and then goes in to catch this mysterious man, though the room is now inexplicably empty.

Meanwhile, the old managers, Debienne and Poligny, are saying farewell to the opera and handing over the keys to Richard and Moncharmin, who have no idea what they're getting into despite the uninvited presence of a weird ugly dude at the farewell dinner. D and P say, "no, really, there's a ghost and he requires us to pay him 20,000 francs every month and keeps one of the private boxes for himself, it's all here in the contract he's edited with red ink." The new managers think this is some sick joke and shoo the old coots out.

A note on finances, because this number will come up a lot--20,000 francs in 1880 or so is a LOT of money. The math involves not just exchange rates and inflation but a subsequent revaluation of the franc but I've seen a few people tackle this, and we're talking millions of dollars a year in today's money. So this is no paltry sum, which accounts for both the harried former managers and the disbelief on the part of the new ones.

Anyway, they decide to sell the box, box 5 to be exact, and this leads to a disembodied voice creating a disturbance and introduces us to the box keeper, Madame Giry, who will become important but not for at least four more episodes. Skipping ahead, because this book is all over the place and its pacing is atrocious, the managers are informed that one of the horses they didn't know they had has been stolen. Carlotta gets a note from the Phantom and decides it's a plot by her young rival and plans a counterplot. The managers, having decided to check out this haunted box for themselves, are in prime position to watch Carlotta tank utterly that night when she croaks like a toad and presides over the tragic death of an audience member when the chandelier comes down on her head.

For her part, Christine is well aware that Raoul is doing his lovesick puppy routine, and writes to imply that as long as he's

stalking her she might as well give him a map. He follows her to Perros, where her father is buried, so they can fight, because she insists that the Angel of Music her father promised has indeed come. That was the voice Raoul heard, and furthermore the angel is going to come play violin for her in the graveyard. You have to admit, this is not the sort of come-on you expect from your average creeper, so combined with her bereavement maybe we can cut her a little slack this time for not immediately putting the pieces together. Raoul does not, and ends up creeping on both of them until he passes out from fright at seeing a skull.

When he gets back to Paris, he goes to see Christine at her apartment, but her adoptive mother Madame Valerius informs him that Christine's currently *with* the Angel of Music from whom she's been getting lessons for three months now. Oh, and by the way, in case it comes up, she's been told she can't marry anyone, so don't even worry about it. Raoul *is* worried about it, especially after his playboy older brother Philippe informs him Christine's been seen in the park driving *with a man*. True to form, Raoul runs out to the park and yells at her, which actually does work in that he receives a note telling him to meet her at the annual masked ball at the opera.

Both disguised, Christine and Raoul meet up and avoid the Phantom, who we now know (gasp!) to be the same person as the Angel. He's currently tarted up as the Red Death from the Edgar Allen Poe story, strutting about the crowds like he owns the place; there's a nice little note in here about how on this one night, at least, the Phantom doesn't have to hide because everyone else is. The would-be lovers fight again, so Raoul does the good boyfriend thing *again* and hides in her room in time to see her enter and disappear before his eyes--through the mirror.

Raoul returns to Christine's apartment to find that she's back, so he confronts her about what he's seen and the implication that, if this Angel of Music really is a man named Erik, the look on her face when he sang suggested something other than religious devotion. She agrees to keep seeing him as long as he stops

snooping around, which pretty much vindicates all his stalking. This morphs into a bizarre "secret fake engagement" wherein the two *pretend* to be *secretly* engaged as Christine thinks this is some way to have her cake and eat it, too. Naturally, this proves an emotional minefield, and eventually Christine drags Raoul up to the roof to confess the whole story, thinking they'll be free of prying ears.

Of course, Erik is listening as she reveals the entire tragic saga: a grieving, sheltered girl; a mysterious voice claiming to be sent by her father; months of lessons where she improves by leaps and bounds; the arrival of a rival which prompts an escalation on the part of the 'voice' culminating in her kidnapping; a journey via horse and then on a boat across a lake to a mysterious lair inhabited by a man named Erik, who loves her; a grotesque face revealed when she removes his mask without permission; and, finally, a return to the world when she convinces him she will not flee. The voice is not an angel at all, but a man. A man of exceptional musical talent, but one who is also cursed from birth and, in his own words, made up from head to toe of death.

We should take a moment to describe Erik as the book does, because this is the primary motivator for his behavior in most iterations of this story, whether or not that's justified. I will note here that while I am trying to avoid ableist language, I am still working on that *and* I'm dealing with works that are pretty darn inherently problematic in that sense. There's been a lot of speculation about what real-world anomalies Erik might have been afflicted with, but the truth is that his genetic antecedents are more likely to be found in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and *The Man Who Laughs*, both by Victor Hugo, on the one hand, and sinister late-gothic villains like George DuMaurier's Svengali on the other. Erik is tall and thin, often described as 'skeletal,' with a face that caused both parents to reject him almost from the time of birth. This face, too, resembles a death's head: thin, yellowish skin; sunken yellow eyes, a balding head with a few strands of hair, and most notably, the absence of a nose. His behavior is also described as verging on the demonic or bestial at times; he

swings his arms like a monkey, or waggles his head grotesquely, or forms his hands into claws to rake Christine's own fingers over his ravaged face. It's important to remember when we get to later visualizations of this character that as originally painted, he's intended to be quite startling and no one in the novel expresses any doubt that he would be hard pressed to pass unnoticed in society. This is not a pitiable war injury or childhood illness. For better or worse, this is a marked man; his appearance goes beyond traditional notions of 'ugly' and evokes notions of death in every onlooker.

In this sense, he bears a close resemblance to the previously mentioned Hugo characters, or, perhaps, Frankenstein's creation. These are men who have no place in contemporary society beside that of freaks or jesters. Often, they are exploited, though these narratives all take pains to point out the cruelty of the world that dismisses them as such. Erik follows in this tradition inasmuch as he is ugly through no fault of his own, and is abused by the world into which he is born. He deviates in some very important ways we'll get to later on, but right now I just want to be clear that whatever our modern sensibilities about how anyone *ought* to be treated, this novel is firmly in a tradition of fiction that assumes very few options for a person born without the benefit of a healthy and intact body. This tradition, in turn, is clearly a reaction *against* the trope of ugliness being a mark of evil in and of itself, so while the characters are much maligned and in many ways problematic, the authorial voice is actually pushing back against the long-standing notion that you can tell by looking. The main difference between Erik and, say, Quasimodo or Gwynplaine is that in Erik's case, by assuming evil, society has actually created that outcome. But I'm getting ahead of the narrative, aren't I?

Raoul is suitably horrified, and true to form, once again confronts Christine with his jealous suspicions. Depending on the translation, she's more or less willing to deny any feeling for Erik--but for our purposes, in the version most adaptations had access to, there seems little hope that her regard will overcome his

appearance or behavior. Getting a sense they're not alone, they flee, and encounter the mysterious Persian who guides them away from Erik.

Upon reaching her dressing room, Christine realizes the ring that Erik had given her is missing, obviously a symbolic betrayal that hangs over the plans the two young lovers make to escape. Which they're going to do right now--oh no, wait, for some reason Christine is going to sing for Erik one last time.

At home, Raoul passes a restless night during which eyes keep appearing at the end of his bed every time he turns off the light. He eventually shoots at the eyes, drawing his brother's attention. They quarrel, and then quarrel again at breakfast over a gossip item in the newspaper about Raoul and Christine. After all, in Philippe's cosmology you don't *marry* girls like Christine.

So now the scene is set for the great elopement. Raoul has a coach and horses waiting, and Christine sings her goodbye. Of course, before the opera is over, the lights go out and Christine is snatched from the stage. Raoul and Philippe both go looking, and here we run into another of Leroux's long diversions from the actual action of the plot. I'm not going to go into it in detail; suffice to say that the managers have been attempting to trick Erik out of his 20,000 francs and the scheme, involving a safety pin, an envelope, and fake bills, backfires. There's a lot of talk between the various lower-level admin guys about why the managers are acting strangely, and what part Madame Giry plays in all of this, but it's frankly an uninteresting distraction given our protagonist has just been kidnapped by someone we have every reason to believe is a madman. Instead, we have to wait through five whole chapters of barely-comedic bureaucratic satire. Whether this is a function of his newspaper serialization schedule, I am unsure, but it's equally possible Leroux found this very amusing.

Anyway, let's get back to Raoul, who again encounters the Persian and for once stops to listen. Turns out, he's known what's

going on the whole time, but everyone in the opera is literally too racist to pick up on that. This is actually a point to Leroux--the 'mystic oriental' character is the only rational actor in the entire text, and the stereotyping of the people around him is borne out to be superstitious nonsense. This is, of course, somewhat diminished by the fact the character is never once given a proper name, and in other ways is described without much regard for actual Persian people or culture, but I find it an interesting tidbit nonetheless.

The Persian offers to help Raoul find Erik's lair and rescue Christine, and has already requested his servant bring them his pistols. He gives one to Raoul, tells him to keep it raised and ready, and fiddles around until he finds the secret passage behind the mirror that Erik had previously used to abduct Christine before Raoul's eyes. They have some adventures avoiding people in the various basements under the opera, which is its own little world of shadow people who could be a whole other essay, and eventually come to a trap door that will lead into the lair. This house is, we learn, cleverly hidden between the outer wall of the foundation and the inner wall that contains the lake. This body of water, by the way, is real, having been discovered when the original foundation was being dug for the opera house.

The two men drop down into the house, though the room they find themselves in is curiously decked out with mirrors on all sides and an iron tree with a noose in one corner. It's a torture chamber, like one Erik had built back in Persia. Likely it is also the place the hapless stagehand Buquet met his end. We further learn that the Persian never meant the pistols to be fired--he just wanted Raoul's hand up in case Erik tried to strangle him with the 'Punjab lasso,' and apparently didn't trust him to do it without a prop.

We now are treated to another flashback as the narrative switches to the Persian's point of view, ostensibly the narrative he wrote after these events and which Leroux later obtained from him. The Persian, as I said, knows Erik's secrets. It seems he's

known Erik a long time, and has agreed to help Raoul less for any particular feelings for the couple and more because he feels in some way responsible for the phantom's actions. Having been a policeman in Persia, he'd been a party to the man's past as a genius architect as well as a torturer. In fact, the Persian had lost his job and almost his life when he chose to let Erik escape instead of executing him, and having followed Erik to France, he's set himself up more or less as Erik's watcher and conscience. As you can imagine, this is a really thankless job and there's every reason to believe that there had been, at least once, some true friendship between the two men for the Persian to hold Erik in such high regard not merely as a criminal, but a man. Likewise, a man with Erik's past does not hold life in very high regard, and the fact he's opted not to kill the Persian despite his constant snooping and moralizing is significant.

This time, however, our heroes might be in trouble. They overhear Erik and Christine talking in the next room about plans for either a wedding or a requiem mass, though they are interrupted by a sort of doorbell. Erik leaves, and Christine explains to them that Erik has given her until 11pm the next evening to agree to marry him, or he'll blow the whole opera up. She also explains that she's tied up because she had previously attempted suicide in order to get out of the deal.

When Erik comes back, soaking wet, and complains about having to get rid of visitors who resemble Raoul, the implication is that he's drowned brother Philippe as the latter tried to search for Christine and Raoul on the lake. Christine complains that the ropes hurt, so Erik unties her, and while he's playing music she tries to steal the key to the torture chamber. This is not the first time she's attempted stealth while Erik is distracted, and it works no better this time.

The intent of the mirrored walls becomes apparent when Erik turns the tortures on, and the room begins to heat up. The heat, and the reflected tree, have the purported effect of making the victim believe he's in a desert with a forest--and water--always

out of reach. Eventually, the victim hangs himself in despair. To stay that fate as long as he can, the Persian has to keep reminding Raoul they're not actually in a desert, though he begins to succumb to the delusion himself after a while. Eventually, however, he discovers the trigger to yet another trap door, and he and Raoul descend into a stone basement full of barrels--only to discover they are full not of wine or water, but of gunpowder. Erik's threats are not idle.

The two rush back up into the torture chamber to plead with Erik, who maintains that it's Christine's choice. He's set up a fancy little box of life and death, with a scorpion and a grasshopper. Turn the scorpion, and she's agreed to marriage. The grasshopper, on the other hand, will set off an explosion that will kill not just them, but probably most people in the opera house at 11pm on a show night. When Christine turns the scorpion, water begins to flow up from the lake into the gunpowder, drowning it and then almost drowning Raoul and the Persian as it fills the room.

The Persian wakes to find himself in the main part of Erik's over-furnished house, with everyone (except Philippe, of course) miraculously alive. Everyone seems calm, and Erik calls Christine his wife--and sends the Persian home. After hopefully a good meal, the Persian confirms that Raoul and Christine are missing and Philippe is dead, and the police aren't really interested because of the evidence of a quarrel between the brothers over Christine's affections.

But more answers come to him. Erik actually visits the Persian, and tells him the rest of his story for, as he says, he is dying of love. In his telling, it was Christine's love and pity which led to a change of heart. When she agreed to marry him, and cried as she let Erik kiss her on the forehead, he realized he could not kill the boy, or keep her. He gives her back the ring, and tells her to take Raoul and go. That she should come back when he is dead, and make sure he's buried. He's extremely emotionally distraught, but neither the Persian nor the author suggests any reason not to

believe him and indeed, a short time later the notice "Erik is dead" appears in the paper.

I want to point out here that in a sense, by initially pretending to be sent by or even *be* Christine's father, Erik actually pre-figures his "giving her up" at the end. His "sacrifice" is paralleled by the paternal struggle to let go, a struggle we see mirrored in other stories, and a struggle other versions will deal with in their own way.

Curiously, there's an epilogue in the author's voice, reminding us of all the work he did to bring us this story and how we, too, might go to the opera and see the evidence for ourselves. What I want to highlight, however, is the pains Leroux takes to give his 'monster' a backstory and plead empathy for him. It's not unusual, in this age or any other, for a reader to find more to identify with in the antagonist. But often, that reader must feel they are reading *against* the text. Here, while no excuse is made for Erik's crimes, both Leroux and the Persian are extremely careful to humanize him. In a sense, this adds to a certain species of dread--the evil is in men's hearts, not the supernatural, and thus always close at hand. But this afterward reads more like a plea for social reform; Erik would not have done these things had society not made him what he was.

I'm belaboring this because it's a theme I want to return to as we explore how this story has changed as it's reached a wider circle, and here's why: I don't think any iteration of *Phantom* has attempted this level of empathy and compassion for the *actually* criminal. As we will see, there are more and less sympathetic versions of this character, but they generally tend to minimize either the violence or the empathy. Rarely do we get a work which says, "yes, this person did horrible things, but they're also a human being we probably could have treated better while it would still have mattered." Come to think of it, it's not just in Phantom-related works that seems like an anomaly, so I wanted to take extra time with that little nugget of social justice. And lest you think this is a modernist reclaiming, it tracks with Leroux's

other career—as a journalist, he took a stand against the death penalty, supported the innocence of the wrongfully-convicted Alfred Dreyfus, and made a point of visiting criminals to get their side of the story.

So there you have it: the story of *The Phantom of the Opera*. The original, badly translated novel version anyway. Before I leave you today, however, I want to mention some of the other antecedents that went into the mix that might come up in future episodes. Phantom borrows from a lot of other tropes and ideas, and some context for those might aid the discussion to come.

Other than the previously-mentioned detective novels and Hugo's works about the downtrodden, I see a strong flavor of fairy tale and the danse macabre/death and the maiden tropes. Anecdotally, a lot of Phantom aficionados seem attracted to Beauty and the Beast type stories, and there's also a tradition in folklore of many cultures of the monstrous or animal husband. These have an obvious source in various social anxieties about marriage. In many of these animal husband stories, a more or less innocent man is cursed to be an animal until he finds the perfect bride. In others, such as Cupid and Psyche, some barrier such as the bride's curiosity comes between the lovers. In still others, like Bluebeard, the husband is in fact a serial killer and the woman's curiosity is actually the only thing that saves her from a similar fate as his previous wives. These were no doubt all familiar to Leroux, and indeed Bluebeard is even mentioned *by Erik* in the text, so even the characters have some genre savvy. Since this isn't a fairy tale, however, Erik does not get to transform. And he's no true Bluebeard, in the sense that while actually not a great husband, he gets to change and reform of his own accord, and does not require dismemberment or shoving in an oven. In fact, there's an argument that the novel is deliberately working *against* the fairy tale genre, by depicting Christine as steeped almost to a fault in folktales to the point where she believes in the voice. The subsequent events are harrowing proof that her choice cannot be as simple as Belle's, because the beast will not change back into an angel.

The second antecedent, the danse macabre, is a sort of genre-spanning trope that dates back to middle age pageantry with the primary goal of reminding us that death comes for all, regardless of station. You can imagine why folks in the middle ages would need a lot of priming for this concept, but we see versions of this throughout history in painting and song, especially. In the Death and the Maiden variant, a young, usually attractive woman is paired with the personification of death. In other versions, skeletons or deaths' heads are depicted at social events, among the living. I think this is especially compelling because of the musical use to which this theme has been put, especially in works like Camille Saint-Saëns' "Danse macabre" which utilizes a solo violin as the voice of death. It's all very phantom-y, when you look back at it and imagine Erik could have been playing this sort of thing in the graveyard at Perros. The book is in many ways one of those paintings or songs in novel form.

I wanted to highlight these progenitors, along with the gothic horror genre, as a way to understand why this story has lasted so long. As you can probably tell even from my recitation, the novel is not exactly a finished masterpiece--while I think there is greatness in there, it's muddled by bad pacing, awkward dialogue, and unnecessary point of view shifts. But it taps into a bunch of things humans really like to talk about, namely sex and death, and it does it by presenting an antagonist who, like Dracula, is well-poised to be reclaimed by various arguments. As we shall see. I would also argue that the less than classic nature of the novel presents opportunities for the producer to meddle without fearing accusations of blasphemy.

And that's what we'll begin exploring next episode: the first, and possibly still most critically acclaimed film version, made a little over ten years into the novel's existence and starring the man of a thousand faces himself, Lon Chaney. We'll talk about the logistics of bringing the novel to the screen, and the constraints created both by the medium and the prevailing social mood of the mid 1920s. Feel free to reach out to me at readaptedpodcast at

gmail, Facebook, or instagram, or readapted pod on twitter. Until next time, feast your eyes, glut your soul on my accursed ugliness. See you then!