

Re:Adapted – The Phantoms of the Opera

3. Claude Raines, Herbert Lom, and the Trouble with Sympathy

Welcome to Re:Adapted, where we take a work and explore why we keep telling the same story over, and over, and over. I'm your host, Kris Pepper Hambrick. I want to thank everyone who has listened and let me know what they thought so far. If you're enjoying the show, please tell someone you think might enjoy it.

This season, we're looking at a long-time favorite of mine, *The Phantom of the Opera*. Last week, we talked about Lon Chaney's 1925 classic. Today, we're going to tackle Universal's 1943 remake and 1962's Hammer Horror version, starring Claude Rains and Herbert Lom, respectively. I'm pairing these two because, though separated by almost two decades, the second is a clear retread of the other and further develops plot elements invented for the Universal film. These plot and character elements are significant, both in that they represent a drastic alteration from the story and meaning of the original and in the way they influence later tellings.

As I mentioned last episode, major changes occur in these versions which alter the nature of our sympathy for the Phantom. In fact, the background and nature of the Phantom are altered so completely as to, arguably, be an entirely separate character. From here on out, there are at least two strains of *Phantom* as a story: one about a genius with congenital physical anomalies who, via society's rejection and his own madness, develops an unhealthy attachment to a young singer and one about an obsessive musician who, through a real or imagined betrayal, is *rendered* disfigured and proceeds to exact his revenge. If you don't remember this from the previous two episodes, that's because this is where that second story is born.

I need to take a moment here to say that this isn't *entirely* true, there was already a secondary strain of Phantom interpretation happening, but we're going to get to it in a later episode. This is because the Chinese 1937 version, *Song at Midnight*, and its sequel and numerous remakes, both jump off from the 1925 Universal film but go in their own direction. For example, these versions *also* involve revenge and scarring with acid, but because I have no evidence that these versions had an influence back onto Western cinema, they'll get their own section later in the series.

This lush, Technicolor remake begins with an opera, and right away the big sound and bright colors tell you what's actually important about this film. Unless you find timpani threatening, or somehow remember that Claude Rains played the Invisible Man almost ten years ago, there's no indication this is a horror film. Indeed, it seems to be a costume melodrama, as you watch Rains' poor violinist, Erique Claudin, get fired from his position in the orchestra due to a stiffening of his fingers. Also a struggling composer, he attempts to sell a piano concerto he's been working on for years. Despite his many years' service at the opera, he is destitute. You see, he's been spending all his money anonymously paying for the singing lessons of an overlooked chorus girl, Christine Dubois.

Christine, completely oblivious to Claudin's devotion, is dealing with two *other* rival lovers: Anatole Garron, opera baritone, and Raoul Daubert, inexplicably a policeman. Christine *is* aware of their regard, and seems to be enjoying playing them off each other. Meanwhile Claudin, desperate to hear back about his composition, goes to the music publisher and is told they have no interest; but hearing his own music being played in the next room (by Franz Liszt, of all people) he leaps to the conclusion that it's being stolen from him. Suddenly murderous with rage, he strangles the publisher until the publisher's assistant throws a tray of etching acid in his face and he flees to the sewers, covering his mangled face.

Thus begins the Phantom's reign of terror, which at first seems to consist of stealing pickled pigs feet and having a long nose and big red beard, or maybe not having those things. It soon amps up when he drugs the star, resulting in Christine's replacing her and triumphing. By the way, Carlotta is called Biancarolli in this version, for no reason I can think of. Biancarolli insists upon suppressing the reviews and returning to the stage the next evening, and is strangled in her dressing room by the Phantom. None of this, by the way, is remotely menacing: you see a few silhouetted Phantoms against a stone wall, and at one point a voice tells Christine she's going to be a great star, but they almost feel like afterthoughts. Christine's Angel of Music is entirely relegated to basically an angel investor.

Having figured out that the fired violinist murdered someone and disappeared at the same time the Phantom arrived on the scene, Raoul comes up with a plan to trap the Phantom, by asking Franz Liszt to play Claudin's concerto. Oddly, he decides this must happen *after* yet another opera, which allows Claudin time to get angry again and drop a chandelier before calmly walking Christine down to his lair. This is the first time we see it, and it's not much really. A piano and some candles in a dank, dripping basement. He hasn't had time to truly decorate, I guess. When they finally play the concerto, Claudin cannot help but play along, and Christine realizes it's based around a lullaby from her own hometown; a leftover plot point that will have no bearing on anything. The sound leads Anatole and Raoul to them, just as Christine pulls the mask off to reveal the slight scarring of one side of the Phantom's face. He attempts to defend himself with a sword, but Raoul fires his pistol, only to be thwarted by Anatole grabbing his arm such that he merely causes a cave-in that kills Claudin, rather than shooting him outright. The three escape as rocks continue to fall. Mysteriously, none of these are lode-bearing walls, and the opera above remains intact.

In a strange coda, Raoul and Anatole demand that the now prima donna choose between them. Christine refuses, opting for her

career over either, and they are left behind as Christine greets her adoring fans.

As you can probably tell, many hands were at work here to create something so completely divorced from not only the original text but the movie it's supposed to be a remake of. To be sure, the type of Universal Horror predicted in Chaney's *Phantom* and realized in Tod Browning's *Dracula* and James Whale's *Frankenstein* had, by 1943, run its course. While horror was still big money at the studio, the stylish and atmospheric early run had turned to mash-ups (a la *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*) and was about to devolve further into parodies (see: Abbott and Costello meet... well, everyone). Universal's *other* big money making genre was musicals, specifically of the type starring young pop opera singers like Deanna Durbin. The idea here was to merge these two top genres for a surefire hit during a time of war and uncertainty. And from a certain point of view, it was successful; it made money and won some Oscars. But from a story perspective, it's a mess, the result of trying to do too many things at once with too many people and not enough attention to *why* the story was interesting enough to tell in the first place. I'm going to outline how it got to its finished form, not because it makes a lot of sense but because it's illustrative of how you get from a film that actually transferred a lot of Leroux to an ostensible remake that ignores so much of the original, it can barely be said to resemble the novel.

Universal renewed its story option on *Phantom* in 1941, initially starring Deanna Durbin and produced by the producer/director team responsible for her other hits, Joe Pasternack and Henry Koster. Lon Chaney, Jr., reportedly, desperately wanted to step into his father's shoes in this most prestigious role, though I have also seen reports that he was never truly considered. The studio wanted Charles Laughton, who had sensitively and endearingly played Quasimodo in *Hunchback of Notre Dame* in 1939 and was thus also poised to take over for Chaney Sr.

In October, story conferences and a reread of the novel led to writer John Jacoby (sometimes listed as Hans Jacoby) recommending certain drastic cuts due to what he perceived as audience tastes changing. The first was to the Phantom's physical condition, which he thought should be caused by an accident later in life rather than an anomaly from birth. As he put it, quote, "physical deformity inspires disgust – not pity." Deanna Durbin recalled later that there were also concerns about the sensitivity of returning war veterans; so now the disfigurement couldn't be a birth defect, but it also couldn't recall the injuries of those returning from the front enough to trigger anyone. Oddly, this suggests a hierarchy of sympathy where people born different deserve none, and returning soldiers inspire too *much*. But it also highlights that the central emotion they want *this* Phantom to engender is pity, not fear. Which is interesting, if indeed it's an attempt to marry musical and horror.

This is all doubly interesting if we take as true the story that in 1935, Universal had unsuccessfully attempted to reboot *Phantom* with a contemporary story about a World War I vet who comes back unscarred physically, but so traumatized mentally that he *believes* himself to be disfigured. While I have been unable to confirm this story, it would have been fascinating and somewhere on the spectrum of cringe to fairly progressive, but we'll never know, as Universal's financial issues resulted in a shakeup at the highest levels and the project fell through the cracks.

Back in 1941, Jacoby suggested removing any hint of the supernatural, having attended a screening of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* where audiences had laughed at Spencer Tracy's transformation. Thus, he said, a new formula for horror had to be invented without the "unreal or supernatural." This was his other reason for favoring an accident rather than a birth defect, somehow conflating deformity and the supernatural in a fairly problematic point of view. Never mind that the whole point of Erik was that he actually *was* a man, people just *thought* he was a ghost. As a concession to his imagined audience requiring something familiar, he declared they had to keep the unmasking

scene and chandelier falling. These being, naturally, the core of the story.

None of these changes helped explain why Christine would find herself under the sway of an unsuccessful middle aged violinist, so director Henry Koster supplied the idea that Christine was actually his daughter, as if that fixed it somehow. In Jacoby's outline, then, he opens with the chandelier then embarks on a flashback wherein poor composer Erique Claudin has a chance encounter with his daughter, who has been raised by his dead wife's family. This meeting somehow activates her latent musical genius, and she becomes an opera singer. Meanwhile, Claudin is struggling both with music and mental stability, and when a prostitute laughs at him through his window while he's fantasizing about the applause he's going to get, he strangles her and gets slashed in the face with a butcher knife.

Claudin retreats to the opera, where he promotes Christine through his reign of terror until he finally abducts her and confesses their relationship. He's lured back up with a performance of his own symphony, and is successfully shot by waiting police. However, Christine's triumphant debut is interrupted when a coal fire in the catacombs burns the opera to the ground, and she and Raoul are the only survivors.

Think back to the novel, where the Phantom is *sent* by her father but also eventually takes the place of a father sending her off to a new husband. This time, we've created a *literal* familial link between the Phantom and Christine, but without the context of the romance it does little to explain his motives, makes it even pervier that he kidnaps her, and erases any hint of a plausible love triangle from her relationship with Raoul. Further, this script opens with the climactic chandelier crash, blowing its big moment before we know who anyone is or why we should care.

Regardless, Deanna Durbin rejected the script. Some sources say it was because it had only one solo for her, and she was a singer, not an actor. Others, that she refused to let her solo turn become

a duet. Either way, she was out, and whether because of that or other issues, the film languished in development hell for another year.

In November of 1942, the project passed to George Waggner, just elevated to A picture status by the success of his B picture *The Wolf Man*. Arthur Lubin, mostly known for light comedy and, later, television, was set to direct. Eric Taylor now rewrote the script and kept Erique Claudin and his symphony but made Raoul the inventor of the phonographic record who supplies sound effects to the opera. Now Claudin's face is disfigured by acid, not a streetwalker, because all that is too sordid. He also expanded Claudin's backstory to involve abandoning his family "for music," resulting in his wife's death of a broken heart. Somehow Raoul finds out, and decides Christine can never know her father is alive. Claudin plans to kidnap Christine and flee to America for the sake of her career, but Raoul convinces him to commit suicide instead and takes Christine to America himself so he can work for Thomas Edison. All of which could have been accomplished with a nice letter or a family dinner.

Clearly, it needed some more work. By January of 1943, Taylor's script had been rewritten with Samuel Hoffenstein, who would later co-write Otto Premingers' noir classic *Laura*. The inventor had now become a baritone, because they'd hired Nelson Eddy, and that's what he did. But Raoul was also there as an added character, now a police inspector, presumably to reintroduce the missing love triangle now that Claudin was Christine's father. This was, probably, also a nod to the Persian/Ledoux in the 1925 film. The notorious Breen office, in charge of maintaining Hollywood's decency, got them to tone down Biancarolli's strangling which might have "an adverse effect on audiences viewing the picture in a theater." I'm not sure what effect, since I'm pretty sure most people in 1943 had heard of strangling before and weren't being introduced to anything new.

Without Durbin, they needed a new star. Susanna Foster, 18 at the time, had been around the movies since the age of 12 but

with no big successes. She was heard singing at a dinner party and was introduced to Edward Ward, Universal's music director. She got the part.

Claude Rains was now the studio's first choice, but after *The Wolf Man* was afraid of being typecast and did not want to be in any more horror films. This is somewhat ironic as in that film, he plays the *father* of the monster, not the monster at all. Anyway, the studio essentially bowed to his request to make it *not* a horror film in order to get him to sign. Worried about retaining leading man status, he told Lubin he couldn't appear scarred in close up, though Lubin ended up getting more than Rains expected by using a second, hidden, close-up lens in inserts for the unmasking scene. Overall, the toned-down makeup is both unimpressive, insufficient motivation for Claudin's actions, and doesn't do much to protect the film from suggesting a wounded veteran. Also if you've seen Rains in anything, you know that he's an attractive fellow but hardly "Hollywood stud" material by 40s standards, making all of this unnecessarily complicated.

If you're thinking none of this has much to do with Leroux or Chaney, that's not by accident. The current producer and director differed in their attitude towards the original film, but neither was a fan. Waggner told the Los Angeles Daily News, quote, "I thought I'd better see the original picture. It was a real surprise. There wasn't any plot—only a horrible-looking old boy swinging around the chandelier, scaring kiddies." He justified *his* version by telling the paper that the phantom was Christine's father. Lubin, for his part, took some sort of proto-hipster pride in not having seen the 1925 version at all. I can find no record of whether they read the book, but if I had to bet I'd say it wasn't even a consideration; I'm more or less convinced that this movie is a riff on the Lon Chaney film plus the high-toned musicals of the day. At this point, the previous film was the IP that Universal was interested in getting their money out of, not the option on the novel. The title and the copyright was the most important thing to get in here.

While three opera sequences occur in the film, only one, "Martha," is an actual opera. The studio's bottom line and the difficulty of securing European copyrights during the war led to a clever solution: Chopin and Tchaikovsky were public domain, so musical director Eddie Ward adapted them into "original" operas.

As for the paternal elephant in the room, the notion that Claudin was Christine's father persisted at least through the beginning of shooting. One of the first scenes shot in January was Raoul and Christine's aunt talking about how Christine must never know who her father is, for what reason I have no idea. But the scene got cut, as did other references to the relationship, without altering anything that would make the relationship make sense. The shared lullaby implying a common origin, the paternalistic attitude, the lack of chemistry; all of this is preserved without any plot- or- character-related reason for it. In Lubin's words, "I always felt he should be her father, because otherwise it would be a little nasty." Indeed. Upon release, reviewers also mentioned the confusion.

Money was tight so they had to source most everything from other movies, except the chandelier. Which, during the final take, the grip mistakenly failed to lower all the way to the floor, which is possibly why you don't see it crash. Within two months of the beginning of filming, the movie was done, and submitted to the Breen office on May 21st. The notorious censor complained about the décolletage of Foster's wardrobe, much to her own confusion, so they went back and edited in longer shots and reshot some footage to ensure no excitement could be caused by the young lady's neckline.

Which really, is indicative of the tenor of the entire picture. Any hint of *anything* is ultimately removed; there's no horror, there's no romance, and even the lushness of the operatic sequences is marred by the fact they don't actually have anything to do with anything, including each other. And they're not big or elaborate enough to stand on their own the way, say, a Busby Berkeley style showpiece does. There's even something timid about the

lack of incest: the removal of Claudin's reveal that he's Christine's father, while in every other way retaining his paternal behavior, makes the menace meaningless and almost bland. He's kinda like her dad, but he's not even being inappropriate enough about it to be all that creepy. She's even given two more suitors at least fifteen years her senior, and I'm not sure whether that makes it all better or worse.

The movie *was* very well received, grossed highly, and spawned plans for a sequel. So in that sense, it was not at all a failure. But I would say that's the only sense. In fact, everything the film does in an attempt to create sympathy and avoid offense alters the story to such an extent it's no longer saying much of anything at all.

Erique Claudin is no longer Erik, no longer a foreign—or, specifically, Germanic—threat, so we don't need to be reminded our boys are dying fighting Germans. He's no longer marked *from birth* as an outsider. The trappings of his world are no longer that of Persia, or the East, or even really the criminally insane despite his homicidal tendencies. Christine Dubois is no longer a foreigner either, and no longer torn between mourning her father, a devilish tutor, a nobleman, and a career; in fact she isn't really threatened by anything much at all, and in the end easily chooses career. (Though it's telling she does not want, or feel she can have, both.) The names, nationalities, origins, and conflicts of everyone involved have been changed, all edges removed, until indeed if the movie is anything, it's as the Hollywood reporter said: it's an "escape for a while from the realistic horrors of the war." Or in the words of the New York Times, "less Phantom and more opera."

The questions raised by the remake have to do with an individual's ability to create art within an unfair financial structure, without actually addressing class or capitalism. The threats are entirely within the social structure, and personal. So in a sense, this film is saying that the movie-going public of 1943 was not interested in being challenged by confrontation with

threats *to society*, or empathizing with the truly down-trodden or ostracized. In a time of war and real social upheaval, the phantom's Germanic origins and even the overtly Freudian aspects of his relationship with Christine are excised in favor of a revenge narrative. In contrast, I would say that the book and, to a lesser degree, the 1925 film invite the audience to confront questions about human nature, compassion and empathy, and the various threats to women and Western society, both external and within.

On top of these changes, this film continues the trend of not allowing any redemption or hint of such for the Phantom. Sympathy for Erik Claudin lies not in who he is, the life he's led, or his final choices, but in tangible wrongs done *to* him in the course of the movie: being fired, being ignored, having his life's work potentially taken away. We are not asked to trouble ourselves with the idea we might need to empathize with a 'monster,' because at no point can you categorize Claudin that way. And in the end, all the remaining characters can muster up is a vague feeling of connection and the weak reassurance that, "his madness will be forgotten, but his music will remain," as if his life and struggle ultimately matter far less than what he'd *produced*. And maybe, in a time of war, that offers a form of comfort.

This softening of the character of the Phantom from a difficult, but redeemable, villain into a repressed victim who does not get to change not only colors future iterations of *Phantom*, but is carried forward and even accelerated in the next major contribution to the genre, 1962's Hammer Horror film directed by Terence Fisher and starring Herbert Lom.

In many ways, the '62 Phantom is a copy of '43 but *more*. The names and places are *more* changed because everyone is English. The Phantom is *more* wronged and *less* villainous. Christine is even less in danger. The audience is asked to do far less, the production isn't nearly as lush or expensive looking, and perhaps that combination is why the film bombed and no one really talks

about it anymore. This is to some degree unfortunate; not because it's a good movie, though it has some good points, but because in only three steps the bizarre villain of the novel that Leroux wants us to somehow find compassion for has become a pathetic middle aged musician beset by the world, displacing any hint of villainy on two entirely different figures.

The film opens, not with a lush operatic fanfare, but with a tour of a creepy, damp cave accompanied by organ music. We see the back of a figure at the organ, and a small man sitting watching him. Eventually we move over to the figure at the organ, freezing on the one eye visible behind his mask. The Phantom is, in fact, visible from the jump, here. There's no suggestion he's an angel or a ghost.

In a way, this movie only works because we already know what's going to happen. As such, it builds what suspense it's got by subverting our expectations. We next meet Lord Ambrose D'Arcy, an aristocrat whose opera about Joan of Arc is being produced. We meet Maria, the star, who refuses to go on because of a figure in her dressing room. Attempting to calm her is the producer, Harry Hunter, who is actually Raoul only we don't know it yet. We see a chandelier being raised in preparation for the performance, and the shot suggests Chekov's gun. We're clearly meant to notice *it's a chandelier*, even if as a prop in the St Joan opera it's a medieval looking job and not at all the fancy crystal we're used to.

We see some of the opera. Actually, in a first, the music in this film is sung in English and built around a story most audiences find at least passingly familiar, which in my opinion makes the longer stretches of it easier to take than the last film. Maria is further menaced when a stagehand's hanged body rips through the set and swings towards her. The opera is canceled until further notice.

It's only now that we meet Christine *Charles*, a chorus girl that Harry auditions for the lead role. Immediately noticing her talent,

he decides she's the one; Lord Ambrose notices something else, and invites her to dinner. At dinner, he aggressively puts the moves on her in a way that suggests that if she does not come home with him, she'll lose the role. Luckily, Harry turns up at the same restaurant and she's able to signal him to step in, which he does. This ultimately costs them both their jobs, but they seem to like each other a lot, and anyway by the next day D'Arcy has fired pretty much everyone else.

Harry, while interested in the lovely Miss Charles, is also becoming increasingly suspicious of D'Arcy, who suddenly has a brilliant composing career despite never having written anything before and having frankly terrible musical taste. It just so happens that Christine lives in a boarding house that once housed a struggling composer with the unlikely name of Professor Petrie, and while visiting her Harry discovers that Petrie's musical scores bear more than a passing resemblance to D'Arcy's output. He tracks down the story: Petrie at one point found himself in dire straits, sold his music to Lord Ambrose, and then died mysteriously in a fire at the local printer printing his music. Harry decides to let it go—they're in enough trouble as it is, and Petrie's dead anyway.

He is, of course, right about everything but one fact: Petrie is not dead. In fact he's so not dead that he has his assistant kidnap Christine and makes her sing his Joan of Arc opera. He wants to teach her, he says, so she can sing it only for him. Fair enough, but he's pretty intense about it and at one point slaps her in the face when she is too tired to go on. He also wakes her up when she passes out by splashing her with gross sewer water. Harry is still on the case, though, so he tracks them down (also through gross sewer water) into the caves and confronts Petrie.

Who, instead of trapping him in a torture chamber or threatening his life, tells him his life story. He did indeed sell his life's work to Lord Ambrose for the paltry sum of 50 pounds, only to discover D'Arcy passing the music off as his own. Enraged, Petrie broke into the printer's and tried to destroy the music and the plates. In

doing so, he inadvertently started a fire; in trying to extinguish it, he accidentally poured acid instead of water onto it and the backdraft scarred his face and hands. Fleeing from the fire, he fell into the Thames and was presumed dead. In reality, the mute, misshapen man living in the sewers rescued him and became his devoted servant, for reasons unexamined by Petrie, Harry, the guy himself, or anyone involved in the film. He sometimes gets really violent for no reason, but hey, he's hopelessly devoted to Petrie.

Having gotten all this off his chest, Petrie confesses he's dying and begs Harry for a month, a few weeks even, to teach Christine to sing Joan of Arc properly. Why Harry is the one to ask, I'm not sure; Christine is given next to no agency in this film other than to ask Harry to save her from D'Arcy, so maybe in everyone's mind she's already given up future rights to her autonomy. It's also unclear why Petrie is dying; he holds out his hands as if to prove it, and indeed they look sort of rotten and black, and granted the sewer isn't a great place to recover from anything, but he's been down there for years by this point so whatever gangrene is eating him up is pretty slow-acting.

Cut to: opening night, and Christine is singing. She is able to do this because Petrie has confronted Lord Ambrose by showing him his face, after which Ambrose fled presumably abandoning his plans for his stolen work. Petrie watches from his box, and his henchman watches from backstage until he's discovered by a stagehand. The stagehand gives chase, and the henchman leaps onto the prop chandelier hanging over the stage—and Christine. Which, of course, gives way. Christine is only saved because the Phantom, ripping off his mask for some reason, throws himself onto the stage and pushes her aside, to be impaled.

As you can tell, there's a lot of questions to be asked, here. Why are so many names changed? Presumably it's cheaper and easier to assume we're in London and use all the sets Hammer already has, but Harry Hunter? Petrie? Christine Charles? Why introduce two entirely new villains, Lord Ambrose D'Arcy and the little

angry guy? Why remove any angle of romance or a love triangle? What actually does this film have in common with the original? Answering that last question is, I think, useful inasmuch as it gives us something like a template to tell us what, at this point, are considered the “essential” elements of Phantom of the Opera. In 1962, they’re clearly making an assumption that you’ve seen either the ‘25 or ‘43 version or they wouldn’t bother teasing the chandelier or subverting your expectations about certain plot points. But here’s what they do include: a masked/disfigured man, a haunted theater, a chorus girl who gets a promotion and a boyfriend, a chandelier falling, an unmasking scene.

I’ve found two contradictory stories which might help explain this watering down, both involving Cary Grant: some sources claim Grant was interested in being in a horror film and was considering the Phantom, and thus the producer, Anthony Hinds (who also wrote the script under a pseudonym) watered down the villainy to give the Hollywood leading man a more tragic role. Speculation holds that he then lost interest, and the part was given to Lom. However, in Wayne Kinsey’s book *Hammer: the Bray Studio Years* Hinds says Grant was originally slated for the leading man role of Harry, later taken by Edward De Souza, so that doesn’t quite wash. I do want to point out here as a side note that, while the Phantom has been pretty much stripped of any potential “exoticism” at this point, the actor playing him here is in fact Czech. However, I don’t really count that as nothing in the character’s background or presentation hints at foreign origin.

Anyway, it seems that from the filmmaker’s point of view, at least, the fact that the phantom isn’t in love with Christine doesn’t matter, as long as he’s in love with her voice. It doesn’t matter that *she* doesn’t pull off the mask, just that it happens at some point. The chandelier needs to fall, and whether it’s his doing or his *undoing* also is beside the point. The phantom, in this version, isn’t even a very mysterious figure; he comes out of hiding pretty early on in the show, and never passes himself off as a ghost or an angel. For his part, the Raoul character is actually pretty great; if you disregard his paternalism towards

Christine, at least he believes women and has the intelligence to solve the central mystery and then the compassion to give the Phantom a chance. This is actually fairly shocking in a film like this.

There is a sense in which, at this point, the Phantom has been redeemed from a inveterate murderer and madman ostracized from birth into a wronged composer at war with a world that has no real place for creativity. In a sense, Erik's been shifted from a threat *to* the worker into a *threatened* worker. We'll talk about that more in the next episode, where it becomes the focal point. But there is, I think, a more compelling argument that this version in fact offers the Phantom *no* redemption, because he, and we, are never asked to do the work. By taming the story into a straightforward revenge tragedy, the Phantom becomes a tragic figure but an even more one-dimensional one. He's been wronged, and the audience is never in doubt about that, so his evil deeds are, if not excusable, understandable. And they're not even *that* evil. By contrast, the original Erik was difficult and complex. He did evil things, he did inexplicable things, he did random things that were just creepy and weird, and yet not only is he offered the chance to repent, but we, the audience, are asked to empathize with him and question our own attitudes as a society. He does have to die by the end, but he's allowed to do so with dignity, after confessing his sins, and not during the course of more shenanigans.

We're not even halfway through the Phantom's lifespan, and he's already been transformed into the 'tragic hero.' And I think the most interesting thing about that is the way in which, by making him in a sense *more sympathetic*, it removes the need for redemption and the need for us to exercise our compassion. There's an assumption, on the part of these studios, that redemption isn't possible for the truly depraved or the socially outcast, and so instead of trying to figure out how to engender that sympathy in the audience, they take the route of altering the character so completely as to render the question of forgiveness or redemption moot. Curiously, along the way the relationship of

the Phantom towards Christine has become almost entirely paternalistic. Perhaps Hollywood, and Hammer, along with their trouble balancing horror and sympathy, also found it difficult to balance sex and death and easier to not ask audiences to worry about the Phantom's designs on the young woman beyond her career.

On the other hand, maybe all three of these films realized that a tearful confession and a deathbed just aren't as visually exciting as mobs and rocks falling and leaping to your death.

I don't actually hate the 1962 film. It's fairly entertaining to watch, with a cast that provides delight to fans of the *Pink Panther* series, classic *Doctor Who*, and the 80s run of *Batman* films. As I mentioned, Harry Hunter is refreshingly decent, even if he neglects to ask Christine how she feels about her musical training at the hands of the guy who started out by kidnapping her and slapping her in the face. The opera segments are, in my opinion, more watchable than the ones in the '43 film, if only because they are about something. And it's not a bad little mystery story, if you aren't looking for the things that make Phantom Phantom. It's a perfectly reasonable big budget film in the *mode* of Phantom, without actually being it.

Curiously, one of the only authors I've found that mentions this movie has a completely different reaction to it. In John L. Flynn's telling, the film is ripe with a strong thematic element of creativity and sex, pitting Lord Ambrose's soulless pursuit of fame and physical pleasure against Petrie's sensual creativity. For Flynn, even the Phantom's lair evokes this raw sexuality that Christine needs to progress as a singer. In his viewing, Christine's singing is virginal and lacking passion *until* she meets the Phantom; Petrie's exposure of his face to D'Arcy causes a violent reaction because D'Arcy is faced with what he lacks, which is, quote, 'unbridled passion and sensitivity.' I don't see this, personally, though the movie Flynn describes sounds pretty great.

The main thing that I want to take away from this episode is that the major studios' difficulty in merging spectacle with complex emotions or morals has resulted in a version of Phantom that is almost wholly divorced from what I believe to be Leroux's intentions. The novel was never meant to be a mere ghost story. Nor does it have much in common with the revenge tragedy. Leroux's project is something far more complex than that, whether it was his intention or not. He is certainly very explicit in saying that Erik is to be pitied, and that his woes are in large part inflicted by society. It's curious, then, that filmmakers in all three cases thus far seem to be unable to find a way to preserve *both* the villainy of the Phantom *and* his humanity. You can have either a monster, or an innocent with a skin condition and anger management issues. And only one of those is sympathetic. It speaks, in my opinion, to a failure of imagination on the part of studios as well as a lack of faith in one's audience.

To give the studios the benefit of the doubt, however, we must admit that a book costs far less to produce and does not have the same demands riding upon it. It may very well be true that Hollywood, and Hammer, were correct in their assessment that not *enough* of an audience existed to find empathy for the character as originally written. And that is the other major takeaway for today: that the economics of the format can alter the demands on an adaptation. Interestingly, the story has become about the individual's struggle to create art in a corporate world, which is exactly one of the problems with these films themselves.

Speaking of which, we'll talk next time about Brian de Palma's 1975 pop culture extravaganza, *Phantom of the Paradise*. We'll examine how his version, the first contemporary adaptation, captures the zeitgeist of an era by finding inspiration in not only the previous films, but other works of horror, music, and real life and ends up saying far more about its time than about Leroux's book.

Until then, thank you for listening to Re:Adapted. This show was written and produced by me, Kris Pepper Hambrick. Please feel free to contact me at readaptedpodcast at gmail, Facebook, or instagram, or readaptedpod on twitter with comments, questions, and suggestions. Until next time, they've poisoned your mind against me. That's why you're afraid. See you then!

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