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### Allusions and Historical Models in Gaston Leroux's The Phantom of the Opera

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# SENIOR THESIS APPROVAL

This Honors thesis entitled

**“Allusions and Historical Models in Gaston Leroux’s  
*The Phantom of the Opera*”**

written by

**Joy A. Mills**

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for completion of the  
Carl Goodson Honors Program  
meets the criteria for acceptance  
and has been approved by the undersigned readers.

thesis director

second reader

third reader

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April 15, 2004

Gaston Leroux's 1911 novel, *The Phantom of the Opera*, has a considerable number of allusions, some of which are accessible to modern American audiences, like references to Romeo and Juliet. Many of the references, however, are very specific to the operatic world or to other somewhat obscure fields. Knowledge of these allusions would greatly enhance the experience of readers of the novel, and would also contribute to their ability to interpret it. Thus my thesis aims to be helpful to those who read *The Phantom of the Opera* by providing a set of notes, as it were, to explain the allusions, with an emphasis on the extended allusion of the Palais Garnier and the historical models for the heroine, Christine Daaé.

### Notes on Translations

At the time of this writing, three English translations are commercially available of *The Phantom of the Opera*. One translation is conventionally attributed to Alexandre Teixeira de Mattos (1911), the second is by translator Lowell Bair (1990), and the third by horror critic Leonard Wolf (1996).

The de Mattos translation<sup>1</sup> is important because it was the first translation available in English (published in England and America shortly after Leroux first published the novel in France), and also because it remained the only translation in English commercially available until Lowell Bair translated the work in 1990. However, several problems exist concerning the de Mattos. First, just as is the

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<sup>1</sup> I have not been to independently verify that de Mattos translated *The Phantom of the Opera*, although I have established that de Mattos translated works from French into English in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, I will hold to the convention of calling the 1911 English translation the "de Mattos" translation.

case with any interpretative work, the 1911 translation is a product of its time. Since it was translated into 1911 British English, modern readers (especially those outside of the British Isles) are liable to find many of the expressions to be so quaint that they distract from the plot. Raoul, for example, imagines the Angel of Music to be a “jackanape,” “popinjay,” and “humbug,” and the managers wave away Mme. Giry’s concerns with a “tut, tut!” Such language now seems both old-fashioned and self-conscious. For a modern reader, these phrases subtract from the edginess of the plot, which is present in Bair’s translation.

The more significant problem in the de Mattos translation is that the text is severely abridged. Leroux’s descriptions and character development suffer the most from the abridgment. Appendix A demonstrates the abridgment evident in the chapter titles - one chapter is even condensed into another. Contrast the following two translations of the same passage, the first from the de Mattos and the second from the Bair.

Sorelli looked into the passage bravely. It was empty; a gas-flame cast a red and suspicious light into the darkness, without succeeding in dispelling it. And the dancer slammed the door again, with a deep sigh (de Mattos 11).

La Sorelli courageously looked out into the hall. It was empty; a gaslight, like a butterfly of fire in a glass prison, cast a grim red glow into the surrounding shadows without succeeding in dissipating them. With a heavy sigh, La Sorelli quickly closed the door again (Bair 10).

While this comparison shows a more subtle abridgment, in some cases, entire sentences, or even paragraphs are cut out of the de Mattos, especially any which complicate motives or develop character depth. Raoul’s character is more complicated in some original passages, such as the scene when Christine

proposes they play at being engaged. Here is a paragraph -- entirely omitted in the de Mattos -- as it is rendered in the Bair, a paragraph which makes Raoul look less like the dandy he appears to be in the de Mattos.

Raoul thought, "She's being rash! In a month I'll have time to make her forget the 'mystery of the man's voice,' or to clear it up and destroy it, and in a month she'll consent to be my wife. In the meantime, we'll play!" (Bair 112).

Raoul is not the only character who is significantly simplified by the abridgment. Leroux provides a two-paragraph biography for Carlotta, Christine's rival, but that too is cut from the de Mattos. Leroux's commentary on Carlotta through the miniature biography is extremely significant, because it provides both a history for Carlotta and a more involved contrast to Christine.

Carlotta had neither heart nor soul. She was only an instrument, although undeniably a marvelous one. Her repertory included everything that might tempt the ambition of a great singer, from German, Italian, and French composers. She had never been known to sing off-key or lack the vocal volume required for any part of her vast repertory. In short, the instrument was powerful and admirably precise, and had a broad range. But no one could have said to Carlotta what Rossini said to Marie Gabrielle Krauss when she had sung *Dark Forests* for him in German: "You sing with your soul, my child, and your soul is beautiful."

Where was your soul, Carlotta, when you danced in disreputable taverns in Barcelona? Where was it later, in Paris, when you sang coarse, cynical songs in dingy music halls? Where was your soul when, in front of the masters gathered in the house of one of your lovers, you drew music from that docile instrument remarkable for its ability to sing about sublime love or sordid debauchery with the same indifferent perfection? Carlotta, if you once had a soul and then lost it, you would have regained it when you became Juliet, Elvira, Ophelia, and Marguerite, for others have risen from greater depths than you, and been purified by art, with the help of love (Bair 75).

Obviously such passages, while not driving the plot, do create more depth and insight, helping the audience better understand the characters' personalities and motivations. The result of the removal of such passages is that the complication and development of the characters are lessened. However, the de Mattos translation does leave the action essentially intact. Since less text is spent in the de Mattos translation on establishing and complicating characters, but the same amount of text is spent on the action, the action of the plot is naturally emphasized. Critics such as Max Byrd and John Flynn have complained that the characters in the novel are one-dimensional, cardboard props. This complaint is understandable, and even warranted, if the only version the critic has been exposed to is the de Mattos, and not Bair or Wolf.

So why focus on the de Mattos if it is a distracting translation for the modern reader, when it is severely abridged, and especially when a better translation is commercially available?

I chose to annotate the de Mattos translation for two reasons. First the de Mattos translation is the most widely published. Because the de Mattos translation is public domain, it is naturally the translation which publishers turn to when they wish to release a new edition, and consequently, it is by far the most available translation to the English-speaking public. As an illustration of this, allow me to submit the following: of my fourteen different English editions of *The Phantom of the Opera*, eleven of them are the de Mattos translation.

Second, I chose to annotate the de Mattos translation because it was the only English translation available to the creators of the most enduring and

popular cultural incarnations of the Phantom legend. All of the English-language artistic interpretations of *The Phantom of the Opera* – of which there were many – between 1911 and 1990 necessarily relied on the de Mattos translation if they were to rely on any translation at all. This includes the cinematically important 1925 silent film starring Lon Chaney and the 1986 Andrew Lloyd Webber musical that accounts for most of the legend's current popularity. If the actors, directors, creative consultants, artists, and others involved in the creation of these works were to consult an English translation of Leroux's novel, they had to rely on the de Mattos; until Bair, no alternate translation existed in English.

Therefore, since the de Mattos is the only translation which could have had significant impact on the most influential cultural manifestations of *The Phantom of the Opera*, and since the de Mattos is the most widely distributed translation in English, I have chosen to use it in my study of allusions.

## Method

First, I read through the de Mattos translation and wrote down every term which was unfamiliar to me, in addition to terms which I thought the average American reader might find problematic, and all proper nouns (which caught everything from street names to fictional characters to weapons). Dictionary definitions of potentially unfamiliar words, but otherwise standard English, were to be excluded from the annotations.

As I was doing research for the annotations, I discovered that the Palais Garnier was serving as a complex, extended allusion. For this reason, how the Palais Garnier functions as an allusion occupies the second section of this thesis.

I also researched the allusive relationship between the fictional diva Christine Daaé and the actual divas Kristina Nilsson and Mary Garden. Thus, my findings regarding the historical models Leroux used for the character of Christine occupy the third section of this thesis.



**Section I: Annotations for**  
***The Phantom of the Opera***

**translation: Alexandre Teixeira de Mattos**

**edition: Barnes & Noble, 1993.**

## Chapter 1

page 31

*Polyeucte* – An opera by Gounod about Christian martyrs, which premiered at Palais Garnier on 7 October 1878. Because *Polyeucte* was popular only briefly, Leroux's mention of it so early in his novel is designed to establish the time period as being about a generation before 1911 (Huebner).

*Vestris* – Auguste Vestris, a child prodigy who made his ballet debut at the age of twelve with the Paris Opera and who remained the Danseur Noble from 1776-1808 (Grove Music).

*Gardel* – A well-known French theatrical and musical family. The portrait is probably of Maximilien Gardel, an extremely innovative ballet master of the Paris Opera House in mid-1700s, who died of complications from a toe injury (Grove Music).

*Dupont* – Dupont is an extremely common French surname, and many of the famous musical Duponts had similar given names: Pierre Dupont, a violin and dancing master; Pierre-Guillame Dupont (sometimes Guillame-Pierre), a violinist; and Guillame Dupont, a Violin du Roi in the 1720s and 1730s. Wolf also notes composer Auguste Dupont, and singer Pierre-Auguste Dupont. Leroux's omission of which Dupont he is indicating may be playfulness of his part (Grove Music).

*Bigottini* – Wolf (28) cites the ballerina Emilie Bigottini who premiered in 1801, but I have been unable to independently verify that an Emilie Bigottini danced in Paris.

*cassis* – a cordial made from a Eurasian currant bearing the same name.

*The Old Opera in Rue Le Peletier* – A hotel which served as a makeshift opera house. An attempt to assassinate Napoleon III there did a great deal to promote the cause of a new opera house (the Palais Garnier) which would have private entrances and covert passageways for use by the Emperor (Mead).

page 33

Compare Buquet's description of "the ghost" to the description of "little Meg" on page 32.

page 34

*Pampin the fireman* - This name seems to be an error in the 1911 translation. In Leroux's original text, the fireman is named Papin, and Bair and Wolf follow suit.

page 35

*St. Andrew's Cross* – St. Andrew's Cross is an "X," upon which tradition indicates he was martyred. The wooden ring is natural as opposed to man-made and therefore magical if called upon to drive away the supernatural (Potter 200).

page 38

*Pomeranian grenadier* - Pomerania was a province of Prussia, now incorporated into western Poland and eastern Germany. Doubtless a woman would not have considered it a compliment to be compared to one.

page 39

*Roi de Lahore* - An opera by Massenet with an exotic setting in 11<sup>th</sup> century Punjab, India. It proved extremely popular for two years, and then was seldom performed after 1879 (Milnes). The opera is important to *The Phantom of the Opera* for two reasons. First, it establishes a relatively narrow time-frame for the action. Second, it relates to Erik's weapon of choice - the Punjab lasso.

## Chapter 2

page 40

*Faure* – Jean-Baptiste Faure, a staple baritone at the Paris Opera from 1861 to 1877. His famous role was as Mephistopheles in Gounod's *Faust*, and his voice is recorded on the same kind of cylinder which Leroux mentions on page 29 (Forbes).

*Mlle Krauss* – Gabrielle Krauss, a soprano sang portions of *La Juive* at the inaugural performance in Garnier's Paris Opera. She is credited with the creation of the character Pauline in Gounod's *Polyeucte* (Rosenthal).

*Gonoud* – Huebner says that Charles-Francois Gonoud was "the leading figure in French opera during the third quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century." His importance to the novel is as the composer of *Faust*, *Romeo and Juliette*, and *Polyeucte*. *Faust* remains the most frequently performed and revived piece in the repertory of the Paris Opera.

*Reyer* – Ernest Reyer was considered a major operatic composer during the 1890s. Wolf cites a plot similarity between Reyer's opera *Sigurd* and *Phantom*. However, this similarity is weak, based mostly on the fact that the heroine of both is Scandinavian. More closely related to *Phantom* is his opera *Maitre Wolfram*, which features an organist devoted to music and scorned by his beloved (Macdonald).

*Saint-Saens* – Charles Camille Saint-Saens was a French prolific composer, writing in most genres with a deep abiding passion for opera (Macdonald).

*Massent* – Milnes calls Jules Massent “the leading French figure in opera of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.” His opera, which figures significantly in *Phantom* is *Le roi de Lahore*, had a “triumphant reception” when first performed in 1877 at the Palais Garnier.

*Guiraud* – Ernest Guiraud’s ‘Carnaval’ is a movement from his first orchestral suite which was incorporated for ballet. Guiraud also had a flair for the exotic which appealed to French audiences (Wright).

*Delibes* – Leo Delibes came from a strong operatic family and was in the premiere of *Le prophete*. His importance to the Palais Garnier rests strongly on his twenty-nine years of service as the chorus master, but he also composed and accompanied operas.

*Mlle Denise Bloch* – No record of a Denise Bloch having performed at the Palais Garnier is evident.

page 41

*Siebel* – Siebel is the extremely youthful admirer of Marguerite in Gounod’s opera *Faust*. This mezzo-soprano role is traditionally played by a woman and is considered to be comic relief. For that reason, it is not considered a “serious” role (Simon 194).

*Opera Comique* – The Parisian opera company which was second in status to the Opera, the company of the Palais Garnier. To emphasize and maintain that status quo, the Opera Comique was required by a long-standing law to incorporate spoken dialogue rather than recitative (Charlton).

*Theatre Lyrique* – The Parisian opera company of a lower rank than the Opera. Their theatre, also called the Theatre Lyrique, burned down during the Commune (Charlton).

page 42

*Brest* – A military port in Brittany, not far from Perros.

*Borda* – A training ship, which has its historical home port in Brest (Wolf).

*Requin* – Artic Circle ship, whose name in French means “shark” (Wolf).

*D’Artois* – Artic Circle ship, captained by the Swede Nordenksjold, which for a time was marooned in Arctic ice on a polar expedition. Leroux interviewed Nordenksjold about the hardships of the expedition for *Le Matin*, after their rescue (Wolf).

### **Chapter 3**

page 50

*two master keys for thousands of doors* – Leroux here is using exaggeration for romantic effect. Reports indicate that when Garnier finished building the Opera, he turned over 1,942 keys to the new manager in a ceremony on December 30<sup>th</sup>, 1874 (Mead 193).

*Revue Theatrale* – This Parisian paper, dedicated to gossip and reviews of the theater, did exist, but only from 1902-1906, long after the timeframe of Leroux's novel.

## **Chapter 5**

page 68

*Perros-Guirec* – A town on the coast of Brittany, northern France. It is not far from Brest, the seaport from where Raoul is to set sail for the Arctic expedition.

page 70

*the 'pardons'* – The time during Lent when pilgrimages were common. Believers performed penance so that they may be pardoned before Easter.

*Conservatoire* – The national conservatory serves as the competitive training ground for young musicians and composers to prepare them to win a Prix de Rome or otherwise bring honor to France (Harris-Warrick).

*Resurrection of Lazarus* – This piece may be fictitious or very minor.

page 71

*korrigans* – Child-stealing fairies. This is a term specific to Brittany, the region where Perros is found.

page 79

*first floor* - This escapade of Raoul's may sound odd to Americans until they remember that, in British English, the first floor is not the ground floor, but the floor above.

## **Chapter 6**

page 82

*Lenepveu* – The artist who painted the original ceiling in the auditorium with "compositional breadth," with depictions of the muses and the hours of the day. This work is now lost, as the ceiling was painted over in the 1960s (Mead 306).

## **Chapter 7**

page 84

*"Faust" on a Saturday* – Palais Garnier generally performed operas on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays (Harris-Warrick). *Faust* on a Saturday would have been an unusual event.

page 90

*Prophete* – An opera by Meyerbeer. The premiere featured the first electrical stage effect used by the Opera. See Appendix B for illustration (Huebner).

*ballad of the King of Thule* – This may be a fictitious or very minor opera.

*The Jewel Song of Faust* – Considered a very beautiful and challenging aria, featuring the character Marguerite as she begins slowly to lose her innocent and naive nature (Huebner).

*Carmen* – An opera whose title character is a dangerous, passionate Spanish gypsy, unlike Marguerite from *Faust*.

page 95

*Co-ack!* – This translation closely approximates how frogs sound in French: “couac.”

## **Chapter 8**

page 103

*the Bois* – The Bois de Boulogne, a large park intended for the recreation of the well-to-do, lies on the western edge of Paris and was created under Napoléon III, who also was the original patron for the Palais Garnier.

*Longchamp* – The horse racetrack which can be found in the Bois.

## **Chapter 9**

page 106

*Red Death* – Leroux’s use of Red Death at the masked ball closely parallels Poe’s use in his short story, “Masque of the Red Death,” when the plague bodily appears in the midst of revelers to dire consequences.

## **Chapter 11**

page 122

*I sang for you tonight* – Earlier, Christine said to Erik “I sing only for you” (page 46).

## **Chapter 12**

page 126

*three domes* – This and the rest of the description of the roof and its trappings is accurate when compared to drawings, photographs, and descriptions of the Palais Garnier.

page 127

*zinc* – The roof is laid with zinc plates (Mead 168), but I have not been able to concretely validate the lead, which may refer to the gutters.

*Moor of Venice* – A poetic indication of the Shakespearan character Othello.

**Chapter 13**

page 150

*Epoque* – A daily Parisian newspaper which featured almost exclusively personal advertisements.

**Chapter 20**

page 193

*organ* - This large lighting mechanism, originally used with gas, was designed so that all the stage and auditorium lights could be controlled by one man See Appendix B for illustration (Mead 170).

**Section II: Example of an Allusion**  
**Through the Palais Garnier**



While annotating Gaston Leroux's *The Phantom of the Opera*, I discovered something which both surprised and interested me: the Paris Opera House is not merely the primary setting of the novel but also an elaborate, nearly continuous allusion that cannot be adequately explained in a single notation. Many of the allusions in the novel are brief, one-time references, which are generally simple, and can be fully explained in a single annotation. As an example of a more simple allusion, the city of Uppsala is mentioned once in the narrative, and my note only needs to identify the specific reference as located in Sweden. Instead of this type of overt allusion to a single building, Leroux alludes to the Palais Garnier<sup>2</sup> in bits and pieces throughout the novel: the Court d'Administration, the stage, the corridors and dressing rooms, the Grand Staircase, the cellars. Thus the nature of the allusion is quite different from simpler, one-time allusions. In the case of the Palais Garnier, the allusion is such a large, widespread one that Leroux often alludes to the theater, not as a whole, but by its individual parts. Leroux never pulls back and gives his audience a panoramic sweep of the majestic exterior of the Palais Garnier, as almost every film-maker who ever created a cinematic version of *The Phantom of the Opera* seems compelled to do. Instead, the Palais Garnier permeates Leroux's novel in a manner which is more subtle and complex than other allusions.

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<sup>2</sup> When academics discuss the Paris Opera House, they generally use the term the Salle Garnier or the Palais Garnier, after Charles Garnier the architect. This distinguishes the building from the opera company itself and the multitude of other opera houses which have called Paris home. I will follow this convention with the term Palais Garnier.

The complexity of the Palais Garnier allusion stems from different, occasionally overlapping, functions of the allusion in the narrative. Specifically, I argue that Leroux uses the allusion in the three following ways. These are:

- 1) The use of historically accurate components or events of the Palais Garnier to provide a convincing framework for the plot.
- 2) The use of historically accurate components or events, such as the chandelier accident, as the basis for dramatic elaboration and to provide a convincing framework for the plot.
- 3) The use of past history primarily to establish a tone.

In addition to these uses, Leroux also occasionally allows the allusion to assume symbolic meanings. For example, an allusion may simultaneously provide a historically accurate event as well as provide an interesting symbol, enriching the narrative. However, before we can explore more fully the ways in which Leroux uses the Palais Garnier both as setting and as complex allusion, we must first address a more preliminary question: why did Leroux choose the Palais Garnier in the first place?

Leroux's selection of the Palais Garnier as the setting was perhaps his single most important decision in writing the text. Of the gothic tales which have gained some status (either in a popular following or in a scholarly tradition), many, such as Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher*, make use of fictitious settings which share a number of elements: exceptionally grand mansions, expansive and forlorn landscapes, secret passageways, and hidden rooms (either up in the attic, as in

*Jane Eyre*, behind the curtain, as in *Udolpho*, or down in the family crypt, as in *Usher*). Naturally, some of these settings are more fully developed than others, depending on the style of the individual author, yet none of them take on the same depth of *personality* as does the Palais Garnier in the hands of Leroux. How does this happen, since Leroux provides the same elements as these other settings? The grandiose and sprawling opera house, the massive and often-empty auditorium, the trap-doors and passages between the walls, and Erik's clandestine house on the lake beneath the Palais Garnier all correspond to similar elements in these other gothic stories. What creates the difference?

The difference is that the Palais Garnier exists in the physical world. While providing many of the same elements as the fictitious settings mentioned above, Leroux highlights the actual architecture and actual history of the opera house, which are not creations of his mind. His references to these actualities bestow an authentic feel to Leroux's novel, an authentic feel which is absent from gothic stories set in imaginary, often unnamed, environments. As a former journalist, Leroux must have found enormous appeal in using a true-to-life setting for a fantastic narrative. The Palais Garnier, as a high-profile Parisian landmark, as an ornate and intricate building geared towards the creation of spectacle, as a famous theater which already asked its opera audiences to suspend disbelief, stood as a ready-made stage for Leroux's characters.

Charles Garnier, the architect of the Paris Opera House, rose from a low middle-class family to become a national figure. In 1842 he entered the Ecole des Beaux Arts where he eventually won the coveted Grand Prix de Rome in

architecture, allowing him to study in Italy. He studied for five years at the Academy in Rome where he became interested in the role of pageantry and spectacle in Italian culture. In 1861 Garnier entered and won the competition to design the new Paris opera house. From his studies of Italian pageantry, Garnier had developed a sense of occasion and drama which (when united with a logical floor plan) was used to good effect in a building which became a symbol of both France and sophistication. The building itself is difficult to categorize, sometimes designated in the Beaux-Arts style, but more frequently known as the "Style Napoleon III." Garnier's elaborate and spectacular opera house provides Leroux with the material for the complex allusion.

Leroux, already the author of several popular detective works in France, understood the need to create a convincing framework for *The Phantom of the Opera*, especially since the plot itself is highly implausible. One way to create this framework would be to use historical facts, which Leroux does liberally in his allusion to the Palais Garnier. Leroux must have found that the architecture of the factual Palais Garnier readily lent itself to the crafting of his "ghost" story (as he himself called it in his introduction), since he chose to embed actual physical qualities of the Palais seamlessly into the narrative. Nearly every feature specifically mentioned by Leroux is a recognizable (indeed, sometimes prominent) attribute of the opera house.

The most surprising of these features used by Leroux is the underground lake, caused during Garnier's initial excavation of the site. While preparing to build the foundations of the opera house, the construction crew discovered that a

previously unknown subterranean tributary of the Seine ran through the site. This tributary compelled Garnier to run eight steam engines, pumping water nonstop from March 2, 1861 to October 13 of that same year, and the architect was still obliged to leave a lake to accommodate the water (Smith 873; Mead 147). Just as the lake exists, so does the “specially designed double foundation” the Palais Garnier required “to protect the superstructure from direct contact with the moisture” of the lake (Mead 147). Leroux found a creative way to integrate this double foundation into his narrative when the Persian strikes it in his search for Erik’s house (202). Leroux was not required to include the double foundation in his narrative, because it not important to either plot or character development, but the inclusion of the double foundation still serves him well. By including such superfluous details, Leroux makes his tale seem all the more real by being less tidy. While highlighted here, this is a technique which resonates throughout Leroux’s storytelling.

Other factual elements of the Palais Garnier feature in Leroux’s novel: the organ used in lighting the stage (193), Amie Millet’s bronze flytower apex statue group, which he called “Apollo’s Lyre” in the novel (126), the three domes and detailed pediment (126), the masked balls held as fundraisers (105), and even the zinc plates of the roof which Christine and Raoul tread together (126) are all independently verifiable. The use of these actual components of the theater is perfectly characteristic of Leroux, who as a journalist provides as convincing a framework for his novel as possible. The incorporation of inherently interesting components, such as the underground lake and masked balls, in addition to

more mundane, unimportant aspects such as the construction material of the roof, all add to the sense of the allusion as a whole. As John Flynn notes, “Leroux’s vivid, journalistic style provides the reader with a kind of verisimilitude” (12), and Leroux’s decision to set his novel in a factual location is essential to that verisimilitude, which he only enhances with continued references to historical events and architectural elements.

In addition to using historical realities to establish verisimilitude, Leroux occasionally elaborates on actual history for the purpose of storytelling. This use of allusion is closely related to the use just discussed; the only difference is that Leroux now modifies the facts to suit his needs, whereas before he incorporated them as the facts as they were into his narrative.

The best example of this use of allusion is the famous chandelier scene, which is arguably the most widely recognized occurrence in the legend, (demonstrated by the fact that a chandelier falls in nearly every parody of *The Phantom of the Opera*). Several researchers have attempted to authenticate a similar chandelier accident which may have provided the inspiration for Leroux’s scene. Although Leonard Wolf indicates a chandelier which fell and killed a man at the Theatre Lyrique (a lesser Parisian opera house) on November 22, 1888 (Wolf 122), this chandelier incident seems to be very unlikely since the Theatre Lyrique burned down prior to the date provided by Wolf (Smith 875). However, a chandelier counterweight did fall in 1896 at the Palais Garnier during a performance of Duvernoy’s *Helle*, killing one patron and injuring two others (Smith 876), an amazingly low-casualty incident when one considers that the

counterweight fell approximately five stories. This chandelier accident is more likely to have been Leroux's inspiration. If so, that for the rather practical counterweight he substituted the more glorious, eight-ton crystal chandelier itself is evidence of his narrative insight: the chandelier is far more dramatic than a counterweight.

Regardless, however, of which of these two historical events specifically inspired Leroux, it is clear that he would have to alter the facts in order to fit them into his vision of *The Phantom of the Opera*. In his narrative, the chandelier does not fall in the Theatre Lyrique, nor does a counterweight fall in the Palais Garnier. Instead, Leroux elaborated on history to dramatically color his plot, while still being close enough to the facts to maintain the allusive sense of the event. Clearly a fine line must be walked, for if Leroux elaborated too much, he would not be able to maintain the sense of his factually-based framework.

Another example of this kind of embellishment is Erik's house on the lake. As already discussed, the lake is quite real, but the idea of an individual living indefinitely on its shore in a fully furnished house (with a piano, organ, wine cellar, and torture room) is fantastic, to say the least. In order to root this idea more firmly in plausibility, Leroux planted the house next to the factual lake, perhaps hoping that the latter would lend credibility to the former. Whether or not these embellishments work probably rests with the individual reader's willingness to suspend disbelief.

The political history of Paris adds a texture to the Palais Garnier that Leroux otherwise would have been forced to invent, or simply do without. In

many cases, Leroux's allusions here serve a double purpose; while providing more of the convincing framework, they often also create a sinister tone. For example, partway through the erection of this national theater, architect Charles Garnier was forced to halt construction because the Franco-Prussian War had reached the streets of Paris. The capital city itself was held under siege by the Prussians in late 1870. The massive, unfinished Palais Garnier was confiscated at that time by the republican government. As Jerrold Hogle notes, the national defense "used the vast structure for an arsenal and a warehouse for food and liquor needed by a besieged populace" (26). A few months later, a radical French communist government briefly took hold of Paris against its will. This was the Paris Commune, which added to the political and social upheaval following the Franco-Prussian War. Many of Paris' narrow streets were blocked and fortified, creating battlefields out of alleys and avenues, just as had been done during the French Revolution. In March 1871, the communist revolutionaries seized the Palais Garnier and expanded its use into an "observation post, communications centre, powder store and military prison" (Perry 13). Garnier and his workcrew were forced to flee and wonder if there would be a construction site to return to, since much of Paris burned during the time of the Paris Commune.

Because of these elements of historical authenticity, Leroux's narrative references to the Paris Commune and its relationship to the opera house not only add to the convincing framework, but also create an ominous tone whenever mentioned. This kind of violence in the heart of Paris would not have been forgotten by Leroux's generation, for whom the events would only be as distant to



them as the Vietnam War is to Americans in the early twenty-first century. This collectively remembered history provided Leroux with a prefabricated sinister element of such strength that Leroux wisely uses it sparingly - only four times - and only when that kind of ominousness is appropriate, such as when Erik chains Raoul in a cell which once held prisoners of the Commune. Instead of overemphasizing the historical connection of the Paris Commune to the Palais Garnier, Leroux relies on the public memory (and imagination) of the opera house as a wartime prison, to establish the dark tone.

In contrast to some of the facts which Leroux embellishes for the purpose of storytelling, some components of the Palais Garnier which Leroux mentions could not have been improved upon even by imagination. An example of this is the flytower apex group, featuring a radiantly naked Apollo raising a lyre to the sky with both hands, while Harmony and Verse sit at his feet and look on. This statue rests at the very summit of the building, a statue group considered so important by Garnier that he underwent the extra expense of having it cast in bronze instead of the newer technology of affixing bronze to the exterior by galvanoplasty. The symbolic contrast between Apollo and Erik seems apparent: the god of the sun versus a “night bird” (143), a dazzling Roman immortal and a man too hideous to be endured, but both tied to music of the Palais Garnier. (Apollo is, after all, lifting up a lyre.) This juxtaposition is heightened because Erik clings to the statue while eavesdropping on Christine and Raoul in the chapter “Apollo’s Lyre.” Additionally, the contrast between what Christine and Raoul are discussing – her captivity in the dark bowels of the Palais Garnier – and their

physical location at the pinnacle of the roof at sunset intensifies the implied disparity between Erik and Apollo. The result of this contrast is to further vilify Erik: to place the ugliest, darkest man next to the bronzed god of sunlight only makes the former uglier and darker. It would have been perfectly natural for Leroux as an author to artificially create such a statue group for this scene, to give it this additional meaning, but, luckily for him, he could rely on Millet's previously crafted work, thus maintaining the verisimilitude while exploiting symbolic possibilities.

Even components of the Palais Garnier which are not mentioned by name in Leroux's work seem to have inspired him in other ways. Most notably in this regard is a key statue group on the facade of the building, one of four prominent statue groups at the pedestrian level. Built by Francois Jouffroy, *L'Harmonie* is intended to be an allegorical treatment of the musical concept of harmony (Mead 187), but in light of Leroux's narrative, it seems instead to have suggested the notion of "the Angel of Music" who, as the persona under which Erik begins to seduce Christine, is a central image in the novel. The statue portrays the bare-chested male angel as handsome, stern, and majestic -- similar to what Christine probably envisioned when Father Daaé regaled her childhood with stories of the Angel of Music. Her Catholic background, an artistic tradition which often depicts powerful angels, only would have supported such an image, and the suggestion of the Angel by the statue *L'Harmonie* is too strong to be ignored.

It is difficult to imagine how Leroux could have set his tale in another opera house for the same effect, achieving what he has in the Palais Garnier. His

original audience, the newspaper-reading Parisian public of 1910, were the inheritors of a long-standing public infatuation with the Palais Garnier, in which is bound the potent sentiments associated not only with French achievement in the artistic world but also with nationalism, sentiments about to erupt in the First World War. These nationalistic sentiments were part of the infatuation with the Palais Garnier, since French opera helped to distinguish the French from other European powers. French national opera is characteristically different from other operatic styles, because the French composers and librettists had often strived to differentiate their art from German and Italian opera (the English were not considered a threat in this regard). Historically, as a high art, French opera expressed the sentiments of the nobility, and later of the mobile middle class. Its castrati were famous, and when the practice of castration ceased, its prima donnas and divas. French opera has been admired and respected as a distinctive form which found its roots in the early Baroque period. Therefore, the national house of French opera was regarded as a symbol of all things edifying about France's culture, a continuation of French traditions, a link to the sumptuousness of French's history and nobility, even after the noble emperor had been deposed. However, while the French public often glorified their various opera houses, the Palais Garnier held a place of high honor in the Parisian's heart.

This national fascination took root even some decades before Charles Garnier was declared the architect. For nearly two hundred years, a variety of "temporary and projected opera houses for Paris" had been erected, discussed,

torn down, or otherwise aborted. Thus, “by 1860, the subject of an opera house worthy of Paris had accumulated such a vast literature and variety of projects, and become an issue of such general interest, that a public competition was the only feasible response” (Mead 45). A tense contest, after several stages, would eventually catapult Garnier, a young man born into poverty, into the eminent position of chief architect, edging out even the Empress Eugenie’s protégé (Mead 7). This unexpected architect won the affection of the public, for he was one of their own, and would eventually earn the respect of the higher nobility who might have resented his original social status.

Additionally, many of Garnier’s techniques were innovative and made for interesting newspaper stories. Before construction even began, Garnier had a plaster model of the new theater crafted for the purpose of envisioning the structure from all sides. While this is common practice for architects today, the procedure was novel for the time. Garnier’s decision to allow the model to be publicly exhibited as part of the exposition at the Palais de l’Industrie in 1863 allowed whoever visited the exposition to share in his vision for the opera house. Newspaper stories followed, declaring that the model was “the new Opera seen through reversed opera glasses,” even featuring a photograph of the model (Mead 150). This kind of public involvement allowed more people to feel as though the new opera house was to be a reflection of themselves, which Garnier took into consideration when planning the layout of the building.

The purposeful reflection of the opera-attending public is especially obvious in the arrangement of the Grand Escalier, which is the main staircase

and hall. Here Garnier imaginatively split the grand staircase into two flights, which join into a very wide staircase in the middle, only to split to the sides again near the top. The Grand Escalier allows theatre-devotees to display themselves in their attire for maximum effect, and the numerous mirrors and mirrored surfaces in the Palais Garnier reflect the public in an even more literal, yet no less significant, manner. Garnier understood that this was an edifice which ought to appeal to as broad a base as possible, though it was sponsored by the government. The bourgeoisie middle-class was rising in numbers and influence, and the establishment of the Third Republic during the Palais Garnier's construction only confirmed Garnier's intuitions. As Mead states, "[Garnier] celebrated this society by conceiving the Opera as a public stage on which the bourgeoisie could, somewhat self-consciously, perform for itself" (5).

After the building had been erected, but before the facade was begun, Garnier had a wooden scaffolding cover the building for nine months while work continued on the construction and ornamentation of the facade. While the scaffolding was necessary, the fact that the building was now cut from view excited public imagination, as families on walks would stand outside the edifice and discuss what they thought was occurring beneath the wooden planks. The speculation continued to such a degree that the unveiling of the front facade on August 15, 1867 unexpectedly turned into a public event, as curious onlookers crowded to get a glimpse of the new face of their national opera house. Garnier arranged to have the unveiling professionally photographed as well, so that this moment could be preserved (Mead 184).

Hardly surprising, then, that interested members of the public continued to haunt the structure while it was still being completed. In the month prior to the official opening of the Palais Garnier, trials and tests were run for acoustical quality, lighting deficiencies, stage mechanics, and other housekeeping essentials. These run-throughs brought so many visitors to the theater that comical articles ran in the Paris newspapers sympathizing with Garnier as he struggled to complete the opera house in the midst of a throng, humorously depicted in a one-panel comic (Mead 175). Public infatuation had insured that the Palais Garnier “become *the* society rendezvous at the beginning of the Third Republic” (Haining 9). This fascination was already inherent in the Parisian public, and Leroux merely had to tap into it. Can it be any surprise, then, that Leroux chose this colorful building for the setting of his novel?

This element of public ownership, as it were, would have been completely absent had Leroux chosen a fictional setting for the novel, or even a different, less prestigious opera house. Again, there is a personality imbedded in public buildings like these, a grandeur and dignity, which is absent from purely imagined buildings such as Poe's House of Usher. The wealth of actual history, actual architecture, actual memory associated with the Palais Garnier allows Leroux to be more sparse with his description of the setting (because he expected his readers to already be familiar with it), and spend more time developing plot and character, without sacrificing the opulence, the voluptuousness, which is part of the texture of the narrative. Leroux even describes the Palais Garnier as “one of the world's most sumptuous settings” (Bair 97), and rightly so. It is the perfect

setting for a tale of masks and secrets, of music and mad devotion, and of the extremes of humanity.

**Section III: Example of Historical Model  
Through the Character of Christine Daaé**



Readers can be strongly tempted to “discover” specific historical people behind characters in novels. The strength of this temptation as it pertains to *The Phantom of the Opera* lies in how Leroux handled his text. Since many of the events and places in his text actually do have a specific historical basis, it seems logical that his characters should as well. Leroux freely mentions historical events, places, operas, and pieces of art: Why would he hesitate to do so with his characters? In one sense, uncovering the identities of the historical people represented in his novel seems as though it could only add to the sense of authenticity for which Leroux strived.

However, three difficulties exist in pressing the characters too much for specific historical models. First, the likelihood that every character in *The Phantom of the Opera* has a corresponding historical person is a little far-fetched, because Leroux has so many characters. Erik, Christine, and Raoul obviously form the core of his characters, but he creates a host of memorable minor characters as well: the prima ballerina La Sorelli, the diva Carlotta, the opera managers Mssrs. Moncharmin and Richard, retired managers Mssrs. Debiegne and Poligny, the Comte de Chaney, the Persian, the stagehand Joseph Buquet, the ballerina Meg Giry, the concierge Mother Giry, Mama Valerius. This does not include the characters who are discussed in the narrative but are absent from the action, such as Father Daaé, the little sultana, and Papin the fireman.

Second, even if Leroux did model every character on a historical person, it would be very difficult to prove. Suppose Leroux had purposely modeled, say, the minor character La Sorelli after a specific prima ballerina. His readers would

have to be familiar enough with the famous personas of ballet history to identify the allusion for the reference to be as fully meaningful as Leroux intended. Even a researcher with access to Leroux's personal documents and rough drafts would find it difficult (at best) to document Leroux's intended referents for all the different characters, if he even had used specific historical figures as the models for his characters. In order for a researcher to demonstrate such a correlation, Leroux would have had to specifically document who he had in mind behind each of his characters, and even obsessively meticulous authors do not always make records as detailed as that.

The most dangerous difficulty the reader encounters, however, is the third one: the risk of allegory. If most characters in *The Phantom of the Opera* have a direct historical referent, the plot would then suggest interactions between the historical figures that almost certainly could not have taken place, since the novel is still essentially a work of fiction, not a headline story or a biographical work. Why is this dangerous? A reader who strains to find such allegorical interactions will read a story which Leroux did not intend, and such a reader is in danger of underappreciating, or completely ignoring, the story which Leroux did intend.

Granting these difficulties, I still found convincing evidence that Leroux did actually craft at least one character with a real historical figure in mind. The character of Christine solidly parallels two Parisian sopranos of different eras: Kristina Nilsson, a Swedish soprano who wooed Paris from 1864 to 1883 under the stagename Christine Nilsson, and Mary Garden, a Scottish soprano whose

dramatic debut in Paris in 1900 assured her a place in the conversation of socialites throughout the remainder of her career.

Of the two, Nilsson is the most similar to the Christine of *Phantom*. A brief 1870 biography, written in the middle of her career by her contemporary Guy de Charnacé, reveals stunning resemblances to the Christine of Leroux's novel. Leroux might have drawn from this biography or from his general knowledge of Nilsson, derived from his background in Parisian journalism. Leroux very probably used Nilsson as a prototype, and the similarities which support this conclusion begin with Nilsson's origins in Scandinavia.

Nilsson, born to a farming peasant family in 1843, demonstrated a precocious musical talent. Despite being a small child, she frequently sang at fairs and weddings to the accompaniment of her older brother's violin. Her father, with prophet-like foresight, frequently experienced dreams in which his youngest daughter was wealthy, famous, and happy, and Nilsson herself was "haunted by her father's visions" (Charnacé 10). Leroux's description of Christine's youth clearly echoes that of the factual Kristina; Father Daaé, a peasant farmer, "was always called on to play for the dancing at weddings and feasts," while the child Christine "sang to the accompaniment of his violin" (Bair 51). Additionally, Father Daaé habitually told stories which featured the Angel of Music, who would one day aid Christine in her musical aspirations. While condensing the roles of Nilsson's brother and father into one character, Father Daaé, Leroux also greatly elaborates on the parental hopes surrounding this

child prodigy. Despite some of Leroux's deviations, the essence of his Christine can clearly be seen in Nilsson, even at this early state.

Impressing a Mr. Thornerhjelm at the Ljungby fair, Nilsson was briefly placed under the Thornerhjelm family's patronage, in the hopes that she would be able to ascend from her humble background. Soon, for unstated reasons, she was transferred to the care of a Mlle. Valerius, who raised Nilsson and tutored her in voice. Once she reached "the age when young girls are prepared for communion," Nilsson was sent to a boarding-school in the prominent Swedish city of Göteborg for two years. There she studied in voice and piano under the direction of an "able professor and composer," Franz Berwald, and significantly improved in both (Charnacé 10). Finally, she decided to go to Paris under Mlle. Valerius' supervision in 1864, to try her hand at opera under the stage name of Christine Nilsson.

In *The Phantom of the Opera*, Leroux continues to offer parallels between Nilsson and Christine. For example, Professor Valerius and his wife become the benefactors of Christine and Father Daaé after hearing them at the Limby fair, taking them to Göteborg. There the kindly Valerius family provide for Christine's education and musical training, and Christine's progress "was rapid" and soon begins to play roles at the Palais Garnier (Bair 51). Leroux again condenses characters - Mlle Valerius becomes the professor's wife, and the Thornerhjelm family is deleted altogether – but as before, Nilsson's early life is still unmistakably the essential framework for Leroux's Christine. The parallels,

especially the specific place names and personal names, are too strikingly similar to be coincidental.

A chart summary of the parallels between Kristina Nilsson's biography and Christine Daaé's biography might be useful to some of my readers, especially to see how Leroux manipulates Nilsson's biography and condenses some of her early life to better fit his narrative needs.

### Comparison of Biographies

Charnacé's Kristina Nilsson	Leroux's Christine Daaé
Nilsson was born to a farming peasant family in 1843 in (locale)	Christine was born to a farming peasant family in an unspecified year in (locale)
Nilsson frequently sang at fairs and weddings to the accompaniment of her older brother's violin.	Father Daaé "was always called on to play for the dancing at weddings and feasts," while the child Christine "sang to the accompaniment of his violin" (Bair 51).
Father Nilsson experienced dreams in which his youngest daughter was wealthy, famous, and happy, and Nilsson herself was "haunted by her father's visions" (Charnacé 10).	Father Daaé habitually told stories which featured the Angel of Music, who would one day aid Christine in her musical aspirations and make her.
Nilsson impressed Mr. Thornerhjelm at the Ljungby fair, who then becomes her benefactor.	Christine and Father Daaé impress Professor and Madame Valerius at the Limby fair, who then become their benefactors.
Nilsson was transferred to the care of a Mlle. Valerius, who raised Nilsson and tutored her in voice.	Professor and Madame Valerius provide for Christine's education and musical training.
Nilsson was sent to a boarding-school in Göteborg for two years, where she significantly improved in both voice and piano under the direction of an "able professor and composer," Franz Berwald. (Charnacé 10).	The Valerius family takes the Daaés to live with them in Göteborg and Christine's progress "was rapid" (Bair 51).
Nilsson goes to Paris under Mlle. Valerius' supervision in 1864, to try her hand at opera under the stage name of Christine Nilsson.	Christine goes to Paris with Madame Valerius and begins to play roles at the Palais Garnier (Bair 51).

Leroux does not limit the similarities between his Christine and Nilsson to their biographies; he also describes Christine’s personality and musical talent in a way which is similar to Charnacé’s descriptions of Nilsson, especially Nilsson’s most famous and long-lasting roles. In turn, Leroux describes Christine as the tragic Queen of the Night in Mozart’s *The Magic Flute*, Ophelia in Ambroise Thomas’ operatic rendition of *Hamlet*, and most importantly for the plot of *The Phantom of the Opera*, Margeurite in Gonoud’s *Faust*. Leroux’s descriptions parallel those of Charnacé, but do not exactly match in every respect; we need to remember that Leroux is, at the end of the day, writing fiction, not a biography. Additionally, both texts are translations from the French, so any to exactly match specific wording is extremely limited. Still, the parallels in the descriptive passages are compelling. Compare a sample of quotations, all of which describe Kristina (Christine) Nilsson and Christine Daaé. Five pairs are highlighted on the following page, but others could also be presented. The words in bold indicate where I see similarities.

### Comparison of Descriptions

Charnacé’s Kristina Nilsson	Leroux’s Christine Daaé
“Nilsson seemed <b>especially created</b> for the role of the page [ . . . ] appears to the life a <b>boy of sixteen</b> . In a word, the rendition is <b>perfect</b> .” (Charnacé 31)	“Christine Daaé was <b>appealing</b> in her <b>masculine</b> attire [as the boy Siebel]. Her fresh <b>youth</b> and melancholy charm made her <b>captivating</b> ” (Bair 78)
“ <b>an unequal singer</b> , with very brilliant notes in the higher scale, dull and feeble in the intermediate, while the lower notes are <b>veiled</b> .” (Charnacé 13)	“ <b>her voice was less firm, less pure, less crystalline than usual</b> , as if something were <b>dulling and muffling it</b> .” (Bair 79)

<p>[Nilsson had a] “<b>calm</b> exterior” (Charnacé 10) [and was] “more <b>dreamy</b> than passionate” (Charnacé 13)</p>	<p>[She had a] “kind of <b>calm, dreamy</b> soul” (Bair 53).</p>
<p>“If her clear, vibrating voice climbed to <b>heaven</b>, it was only that from those heights she might curse as a Titaness; for the notes came from her mouth as <b>serpents of fire</b>, and she sneers like <b>Hecate</b>.” (Charnacé 15)</p> <p>“<b>sublime</b> in this <b>prison-trio</b> [in <i>Faust</i>]. With an enthusiasm almost <b>supernatural</b>, this <b>passionate, delirious music bursts from her lips</b> [ . . . ] <b>Human voice could not do more.</b>” (Charnacé 28)</p>	<p>“What is the origin of the <b>sublime</b> talent she had today? If it did not come down from <b>heaven</b> on the wings of love, I must believe that it came up from <b>hell</b> and that Christine Daaé [ . . . ] has made a pact with the <b>devil!</b> Anyone who has not heard her sing the final <b>trio</b> in <i>Faust</i> does not know <i>Faust: the exaltation of a voice and the rapture of a pure soul can go no further!</i>” (Bair 18)</p>
<p>“she reigns the <b>ideal of an Ophelia</b>, [of the] <b>Queen of the Night</b> (Charnacé 36)</p> <p>“the Scandinavian heroine of Shakespeare suddenly stands before us in all her pale beauty, mad, with her fair hair falling around her, her blue eyes strange and staring [ . . . ] <b>It is Ophelia herself before us.</b> (Charnacé 22).</p> <p>“What better selection [than <i>The Magic Flute</i>] could have been chosen to reveal her strange characteristics?”(Charnacé 14)</p> <p>[In <i>The Magic Flute</i>] her “<b>clear, vibrating voice climbed to heaven</b>” (Charnacé 15)</p>	<p>“When one hears her in Ambroise Thomas's <i>Hamlet</i>, <b>one wonders if Shakespeare came from the Elysian Fields to rehearse her in the role of Ophelia.</b> It is true that when she dons the starry diadem of the <b>Queen of the Night</b>, Mozart must leave his eternal abode to come and hear her. But no, there is no need for him to leave, because the <b>strong, vibrant voice</b> of the magic interpreter of his <i>Magic Flute</i> comes to him, easily <b>rising up to heaven</b>” (Bair 49).</p>

While most of these quotations do not use terms which precisely match their highlighted counterparts, they do tend to share comparable terms and images when describing like situations. For example, both Nilsson and Christine are described favorably when they are required to play youthful masculine roles on the stage, though Leroux’s quotation does not directly employ the terms found in de Charnacé. If Nilsson is “especially created” and “perfect” as a page, while

Christine is “appealing” and “captivating” in a similar role, then both writers have successfully conveyed the same concept to his audience. Since the same sense of charm is created in both passages, then the fact that synonyms are used rather than the precise phrases is not important.

Leroux again imitates de Charnacé when he describes Christine's voice as she performs the role of Marguerite during the prison scene in *Gonoud's Faust*, the single most important operatic role in *The Phantom of the Opera*, and the scene where Erik kidnaps Christine from the stage. De Charnacé, when describing Nilsson in the same role, uses supernatural images like “heaven,” “serpents of fire,” and “Hecate,” and Leroux follows suit with “heaven,” “hell,” and “Devil.” Both authors ecstatically conclude that his diva had perfected the trio so that no diva who follows could supercede her accomplishment. The sense of the passages is very similar, and Leroux's description is certainly reminiscent of de Charnacé.

While these highlighted passages are not quoted verbatim by Leroux, there is a strong sense that he was, at the very least, quite familiar with Nilsson's reputation and repertory, and very likely with de Charnacé's biography of her. Both authors riddle their respective texts with constant terms describing their heroine's character, often in exactly the same language. Christine and Nilsson are so frequently described in terms of innocence, purity, naiveté, calmness, guilelessness, beauty, freshness, simplicity, and candor that the reader begins to wonder what they feed the children in Sweden, and how one might go about procuring some of it. What is clear is Nilsson's reputation for virtue is established



in the media of her day, and Leroux crafts Christine's reputation to follow that of Nilsson's.

Charnacé frequently speaks of Nilsson in the most fairy-tale tones, which Leroux also does for Christine. De Charnacé pretends, for example, that an uninvited fairy godmother bestowed a musical genius on Nilsson at her christening (6), a fairy who continued to watch over and guide her, especially in her music and even after Nilsson has grown up (21). This directly coincides with Father Daaé's legend of the Angel of Music, who sometimes came to prodigies in their cradle, and Father Daaé's promise to send that Angel to watch over Christine (Bair 53-4). Charnacé repeatedly reminds his readers of Nilsson's peasant roots, and compares her favorably to folk-tale commoners who, through hard work and luck, have become queens. Leroux himself begins the telling of Christine's childhood with the tell-tale "once upon a time" (Bair 51). The fairy-tale tone which Leroux occasionally uses, mixed in with his falsified police reports and other invented first-hand documents, prevents *The Phantom of the Opera* from turning into a simple detective story by providing an element of wonder and a fairy-tale tone he uses often when describing Christine.

But is Leroux's Christine related to Charnacé's Kristina only by chance? For the ultimate skeptic, the greatest evidence that Nilsson is the primary operatic diva on whom Christine is modeled is Leroux's conspicuous use of identical or very similar names in both of their histories. The appearance of such specific names as Valerius, Göteborg, Ljungby/Limby, and Christine's own name in both accounts convincingly indicates that Leroux used Nilsson as his primary

model. The reappearance of multiple names from Nilsson's life into Christine's could not have been accidental. Leroux even used the names at the equivalent points in Christine's life as they figured in Nilsson's life, further demonstrating that he was familiar with the history of Nilsson's childhood and youth.

Why does Leroux stop using Nilsson's life as a direct model for Christine at the point when Nilsson reaches Paris? The adult Christine still retains all the acclaimed personality characteristics of the adult Nilsson – the freshness, the simplicity, the beauty – but while Nilsson makes celebrated appearances in London's Covent Garden and buys the mortgage for her parents' village home in Sweden, Leroux's Christine is twice kidnapped into a labyrinthine nightmare beneath the Palais Garnier and is forced to make a decision which could possibly cost the lives of several thousand Parisians. The difference is not difficult to account for when the reader remembers that Leroux uses Nilsson only as a model, not as a direct allusion.

If Nilsson provided Leroux with the basic personality and childhood history for Christine, then Mary Garden, the reigning diva of Paris during Leroux's time, possibly provided Leroux with an idea or two about his heroine. Mary Garden was a Scottish lyrical soprano who had become a household name in Europe and the United States by 1910, the year Leroux serialized his novel in Paris. While Nilsson remains the primary inspiration for Christine, at least two elements of Christine's career resembles Garden's: her nimble combination of excellent singing and acting, and her sensational debut. Several times in *The Phantom of the Opera*, Leroux places Christine in opposition to her rival, a Spanish diva

named Carlotta. Carlotta is accused by the narrator of being a splendid soprano, but one who sings soullessly, who cannot act or interpret the feelings which her arias are intended to express (Bair 75), with the implication that Christine is capable of the opposite. Christine, in fact, says that she sings with her soul (Bair 24) and the narrator concurs. "We must pity those who never heard Christine Daaé [ . . . ], who never thrilled to the accents of her angelic voice, who never felt their soul soar with hers" (Bair 17). Excelling in the opera required not only technical musical quality, but also the ability to interpret and act convincingly; opera is, after all, theater.

It would appear that Christine's operatic style is modeled after Garden's, especially the quality of her voice and ability to combine music with acting. Enthusiastic descriptions of Garden's voice credit her "with uncommonly vivid powers of characterization and a rare subtlety of colour and phrasing" (Turnbull 536). One critic went further to claim that "none questioned her remarkable gift for tone colouring [and] subtle phrasing," hailing Garden "as the supreme singing-actress" (Fletcher 350). Indeed, her contemporary William Armstrong wrote that "Miss Garden [ . . . ] sings a role not with her voice alone, but with her whole being" (131). Most notable, however, is the description given by Armstrong concerning how other sopranos paled when compared to Garden. "We have perfect technicians, but they have no heart, no life, no feeling, no soul; they have only ambition, vanity, and greed" (138-9). Soulless divas around Garden were in sharp contrast to her, just as the narrator in *The Phantom of the Opera* contrasts soulless Carlotta against Christine and her immense stage capability (Bair 74).

Musical and dramatic gifts aside, however, Garden's chief similarity to Leroux's heroine remains her sensationalistic debut in the domain of Parisian opera. On April 10, 1900, Garden made her unexpected debut in the title role of *Louise* after Marthe Rioton, the soprano trained for the part, collapsed after the first act (Turnbull 536). Garden's debut won her a great deal of acclamation and was widely discussed in the newspapers; Armstrong discusses the matter as if the story was an oft-repeated one (133). She immediately went on to permanently replace Marthe Rioton, and Garden's "public interpretation of the role [of the character Louise] brought her two hundred and five appearances in it" (Armstrong 133), effectively launching a long and successful career. Even years after her first operatic performance, Garden proved able to draw formidable crowds to see her. Armstrong credits her 1909 interpretation of *Salome* as drawing the largest audiences "in the history of the Paris Opera" (136).

Christine experienced a similarly glorious debut in the opening chapters of Leroux's work, singing the role of Marguerite from *Faust* when Carlotta had fallen inexplicably ill (Bair 17-18). The incident continues to resonate throughout the work, as Carlotta attempts to prevent Christine from experiencing a second such exceptional performance. Newspaper columnists, who had taken to praising Christine's debut, are pressured to focus instead on Carlotta's career; quite simply, "Carlotta had not forgiven Christine for achieving a great triumph when she replaced her at a moment's notice" (Bair 74). Christine's "great triumph" had the potential to give her the leverage to replace Carlotta, just as Garden's surprising debut did to Rioton. Indeed, Christine's final performance of *Faust*,

during which she is abducted, is witnessed by “thousands of enthusiastic spectators” (Bair 153), which sounds quite similar to Garden’s ability to attract the largest crowds in the history of French opera.

Here, however, Leroux’s allusions to Garden through Christine seems to be at an end. Garden’s personality, for one, is unrelenting. Armstrong writes that she bent fate to her will, that she was “the type that rules” (128). Christine, on the other hand, is frightened by her initial critical success (Bair 5). In addition to an extremely devoted ambition to her art, Garden boasted a strong sense of practicality, a trait which seems utterly lacking in the child-like, dreamy Christine. “It is doubtful,” Armstrong comments, “if Miss Garden indulged at any time in day dreams” (130). However, Leroux doesn’t need to rely on Garden for his rendering of Christine’s personality – he has plenty of material in Nilsson for that aspect of Christine’s character. It is enough that Christine’s notable artistic style and spectacular debut match that of Garden’s for us to see a plausible link to Garden.

Leroux’s use of Nilsson and Garden is fundamentally very different from his use of the Palais Garnier, although at first glance the uses would appear identical. As previously established, Leroux primarily used the Palais Garnier to provide a convincing framework on which he hung his plot, something already familiar to his original audience to lend a sense of realism to a highly implausible plot (although every event in the novel is technically possible). In a sense, the very intricate allusion to the historically accurate Palais Garnier serves as an anchor. It would be easy to assume that Leroux is using the historical figures of Kristina Nilsson and Mary Garden in the same way, since Nilsson, Garden, and

the Palais Garnier are all individually and independently true, and are not created by Leroux. That assumption would be false. Leroux is using the Palais Garnier as an allusion, but he is using Nilsson and Garden as character models. Leroux wants the audience to be aware of the Palais Garnier as important to the plot, adding realism and a sense of the grandiose, but Leroux never draws attention to his borrowing from the lives and careers of Nilsson and Garden. Essentially, the character of Christine Daaé is derivative, but non-allusive. In fact, for some readers, the knowledge that Christine Daaé is based on historical divas may *lessen* the sense of authenticity for which Leroux strived, because that knowledge could upstage the fictional character, constantly reminding the reader that the Christine they are reading in *The Phantom of the Opera* is based on a historical person.

If this thesis is a study of the allusion in *The Phantom of the Opera*, why go to such lengths to describe character models, which in the end are not allusions? First, historical allusions and historical character models both require similar kinds of research to understand, and whether something is functioning as an allusion or as a model may not be clear at the onset of research. Second, demonstrating what an allusion is *not* helps us better understand what an allusion is. It is easy to be fooled into thinking that all fictional elements with historical basis must therefore be allusions to the history, but that is not necessarily so.

Both Nilsson and Garden were still alive and well-known when *The Phantom of the Opera* was first published in 1910. Nilsson, though retired from

the stage, would live until 1921 (Forbes 924), and Garden actively pursued her operatic career into the 1930s (Turnbull 537). Christine Daaé, however, outlasts both of the divas on which she is based. The frequent production of films, plays, musicals, and fiction based on *The Phantom of the Opera* has facilitated the establishment of Leroux's original story as a part of our cultural vocabulary, and as long as they remain popular, then Christine will continue to attract audiences numbering into the hundreds of thousands.

## Appendix A

### Side-by-Side Comparison of Chapter Titles in de Mattos, Bair, and Wolf

Chapters	de Mattos	Chapters	Lowell Bair	Leonard Wolf
	Prologue - In Which the Author of This Singular Work Informs the Reader How He Acquired the Certainty That the Opera Ghost Really Existed		Foreword, In Which the Author of This Singular Work Tells the Reader How Was Led to Become Certain that the Opera Ghost Really Existed	Preface, In Which the Author of This Singular Work Tells the Reader How It Was That He Became Persuaded that the Phantom of the Opera Really Existed
01	Is It the Ghost?	01	Was It the Ghost?	Is It the Phantom?
02	The New Margarita	02	The New Marguerite	The New Marguerite
03	The Mysterious Reason	03	In Which, For the First Time, Debieenne and Poligny Secretly Give the New Managers of the Opera, Armand Moncharmin and Firmin Richard, the Real and Mysterious Reason for Their Departure from the National Academy of Music	In Which, For the First Time, Messrs. Debieenne and Poligny Secretly Tell the New Directors of the Opera, Messrs. Armand Moncharmin and Firmin Richard, the True and Mysterious Reason for Their Departure from the National Academy of Music
04	Box Five	04	Box Five	Box Number Five
		05	Continuation of "Box Five"	Continuation of "Box Number Five"
05	The Enchanted Violin	06	The Enchanted Violin	The Enchanted Violin
06	A Visit to Box Five	07	A Visit to Box Five	A Visit to Box Five
07	Faust and What Followed	08	In Which Firmin Richard and Armand Moncharmin Dare to Have Faust Performed in a "Cursed" Opera	In Which Messrs. Firmin Richard and Armand Moncharmin Have the Audacity to Present Faust in an Auditorium That Has Been Cursed, and the Frightful Event that



			House, and We See the Frightful Consequences	Followed Thereupon
08	The Mysterious Brougham	09	The Mysterious Brougham	The Mysterious Brougham
09	At the Masked Ball	10	At the Masked Ball	At the Masked Ball
10	Forget the Name of the Man's Voice	11	You Must Forget the Name of "the Man's Voice"	The Name of the Man's Voice Must Be Forgotten
11	Above the Trap-Doors	12	Above the Trapdoors	Above the Trapdoors
12	Apollo's Lyre	13	Apollo's Lyre	Apollo's Lyre
13	A Master-Stroke of the Trap-Door Lover	14	A Masterstroke by the Lover of Trapdoors	A Trapdoor Lover's Masterstroke
14	The Singular Attitude of a Safety-Pin	15	The Singular Behavior of a Safety-Pin	The Remarkable Behavior of a Safety Pin
15	Christine! Christine!	16	"Christine! Christine!"	Christine! Christine!
16	Mme. Giry's Revelations	17	Astonishing Revelations by Madame Giry, Concerning Her Personal Relations with the Opera Ghost	Astonishing Revelations by Mme. Giry Regarding Personal Relations with the Phantom of the Opera
17	The Safety-Pin Again	18	Continuation of "The Singular Behavior of a Safety-Pin"	More About the Remarkable Behavior of a Safety Pin
18	The Commissary, the Viscount and the Persian	19	The Policeman, the Viscount, and the Persian	The Superintendent of Police, the Viscount, and the Persian
19	The Viscount and the Persian	20	The Viscount and the Persian	The Viscount and the Persian
20	In the Cellars of the Opera	21	In the Cellars of the Opera	In the Opera's Cellars
21	Interesting Vicissitudes	22	Interesting and Instructive Tribulations of a	Interesting and Instructive Tribulations of a Persian in the Opera's Cellars

			Persian in the Cellars of the Opera	
22	In the Torture Chamber	23	In the Torture Chamber	In the Torture Chamber
23	The Tortures Begin	24	The Tortures Begin	The Tortures Begin
24	Barrels! Barrels!	25	"Barrels! Barrels! Any Barrels to Sell?"	"Barrels! Barrels! Have You Any Barrels for Sale?"
25	The Scorpion or the Grasshopper: Which?	26	The Scorpion or the Grasshopper?	To Turn the Scorpion? Or To Turn the Grasshopper?
26	The End of the Ghost's Love Story	27	End of the Ghost's Love Story	The Phantom's Love Story Concluded
	Epilogue		Epilogue	Epilogue

Appendix B

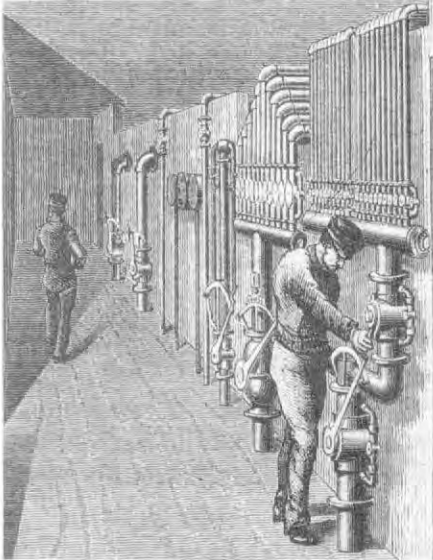


Figure 1.  
The Palais Garnier lighting organ.  
Charles Nutter. *Le Nouvel Opera*, n.d.

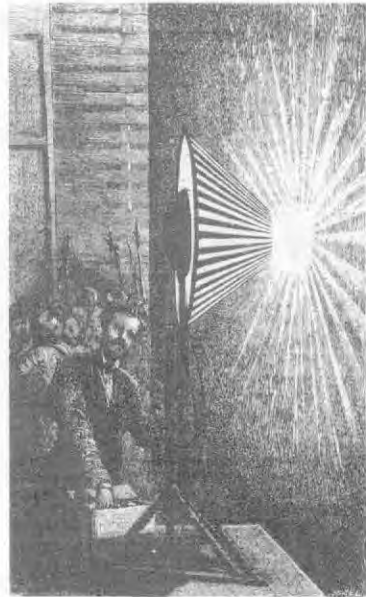


Figure 2.  
First electrical special effect  
at Paris Opera for performance  
of *Le Prophete*. M. J. Moynet.  
*L'inverns du theatre Paris*,  
1873.

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