

Stanford House Classics - Elementary

THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA

Gaston Leroux

literature analysis and response



THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA

Gaston Leroux

The Phantom of the Opera is one of the immortal novels of the 20th century, in the same genre as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, *Beauty and the Beast* and many others. Seven film versions exist, the first and best of which dates back to 1925 (a silent movie!). The most recent, *Darkman* by Sam Raimi, was made in 1990. The musical version, has been performed all over Europe and is still a box-office success in London.

The author, **Gaston Leroux**, was born in Paris in 1868. Both a lawyer and a journalist, Leroux began writing novels at the age of 35. His writing style revealed his taste and talent for mystery and intrigue. In all, he wrote 34 novels and 7 plays for the theatre. Several of his stories have been made into films. He died in Nice in 1927. The absence of his work from bookshelves beside those of literary giants is quite unjustifiable.



Stanford House

CHAPTER ONE • IS IT THE PHANTOM?

It was a gala evening at the Paris Opera House and Madame Sorelli, one of the stars of the ballet, was getting ready to make a special speech for the occasion. Suddenly, she found her dressing-room invaded by a small group of girls from the ballet company, some laughing hysterically, others screaming with terror.

“What is the matter?” asked Madame Sorelli, trying to calm them down.

Little Jammes, her voice trembling, stepped out and said:

“It’s the phantom!”

Madame Sorelli went and locked the door. She was very superstitious. Trying to sound calm, she said, “Silly little thing!” But, since she was the first to believe in ghosts she immediately continued, “Did you really see it?”

“As clearly as I see you!” answered Jammes, her knees shaking so much she had to sit down.

“And he’s really ugly!” added little Meg.

“Oh, yes!” the rest of the little ballerinas cried in chorus.

Then they all started talking at once. The phantom had suddenly appeared along the passage, coming from who knows where. He was dressed very elegantly.

“Oh, come on!” said Madame Sorelli, “you see the phantom everywhere!”

It was true that during the last few months everyone at the Opera House was always talking about a phantom elegantly dressed in top hat and tails¹. He wandered up and down the building, never speaking to anyone, and no one daring to speak to him, also because, as soon as someone saw him he vanished. At first, the people joked and laughed, but soon the legend of the phantom grew out of proportion. Almost everyone claimed² that they had seen that supernatural being and when he did not show himself, he made his presence felt through extravagant events like accidents or objects disappearing. If people hurt themselves it was the phantom’s fault³. If the lighting failed it was the phantom at work. If a ballerina lost her make-up brush the phantom had stolen it. Everything was blamed⁴ on the Phantom of the Opera!

But how could they be sure it was a ghost? Lots of men were dressed like that at the Opera House. Yes, but this was a skeleton, not a man. Some had seen him clearly. They had seen his skull⁵.

The best description of him was made by Joseph Buquet, head

1. Write six sentences about the Phantom using the key words:

- a) ugly
- b) elegant
- c) suddenly
- d) vanished
- e) ghost
- f) skeleton

2. Complete the following sentences:

- a) The ballet dancers were laughing and screaming because.....
- b) Madame Sorelli said “Silly little thing” to
- c) Jammes’s knees were shaking so she.....
- d) At the Opera House strange things happened, like.....
- e) At the Opera lots of men wear
- f) The Phantom had become a.....

1. **tails:** jacket with two long ‘tails’, worn on very special occasions.

2. **claimed:** declared.

3. **fault:** responsibility for causing a mistake.

4. **blamed:** considered responsible or at fault.

5. **skull:** bone framework of the head.

technician, who had come face to face with the mysterious individual while descending the ladder from the stage. He had time to see him clearly before the phantom fled¹ away.

"He is incredibly thin, his eyes so deeply buried that you can barely² see the pupils – two large black holes like you see in the skull of a dead man. His skin is not white but a horrible yellow. His nose is so small that you can't even see it and his hair consists of three or four long strands³ hanging down over his face and behind his ears."

Joseph Buquet had tried in vain⁴ to follow the phantom but he disappeared. Joseph was a quiet, serious man and the others listened to him, full of fear and amazement. They hoped he was the victim of a joke but soon others began to recount their own personal visions of that disgusting creature.

Madame Sorelli decided to do something to protect the building from all that evil. The next day a horseshoe was placed on the table at the entrance to the Opera House and everyone was advised to touch it before entering. That same horseshoe is still there!

CHAPTER TWO • A MYSTERIOUS DEATH

"Joseph Buquet should learn to keep his mouth shut!" muttered little Meg.

"Why?" asked Madame Sorelli.

"Cause⁵ Mummy thinks..."

"What does your mother think?" asked Madame Sorelli, impatiently.

"I...I... can't tell..."

The ballerinas begged⁶ Meg to explain.

"But I promised Mummy not to tell."

"We can keep a secret, can't we, Madame Sorelli?"

"Yes! Yes! Of course! Go on, Meg. Tell us what you know."

"Alright. It's about the box⁷."

"What box, Meg?"

"The Phantom's box."

"The Phantom has a box?"

"Box number five, the one nearest to the stage, on the left."

"Oh, my God!" exclaimed Madame Sorelli. "It's not possible..."

"Mummy's the usherette⁸. Promise not to tell?"

"Cross our hearts and hope to die⁹," cried the ballerinas in chorus.

"Well, nobody is allowed¹⁰ to go in there. It's been a month now. Only the phantom. There are orders not to sell tickets for it. Only the phantom can use it."

3. Use your exercise book: draw a picture of the Phantom following Joseph Buquet's description.

4. Answer the questions:

a) How was Joseph able to describe the Phantom so clearly?

.....

b) What did Madame Sorelli do to protect the Opera House and the people working there?

.....

c) What was so special about Box n°5?

.....

d) What did Meg make the other ballerinas promise?

.....

e) Who told Meg about the Phantom's orders?

.....

f) Who was allowed to use Box n°5?

.....

1. **fled:** (to flee, fled, fled) ran away.

2. **barely:** hardly, with difficulty.

3. **strands:** thin lengths, usually of hair.

4. **in vain:** without success.

5. **'cause:** because.

6. **begged:** pleaded, asked in desperation.

7. **box:** separate compartment with seats for several persons, in theatres – very expensive tickets.

8. **usherette:** (male » usher) person who shows people to their seats at the theatre etc.

9. **cross our hearts and hope to die:** English expression used when making promises.

10. **allowed:** permitted.

“So your Mum’s seen him?”

“No, nobody sees him. But you can hear him!”

“Little Meg, you’re teasing¹ us, aren’t you?” interrupted Madame. Meg began to cry. “I knew I shouldn’t have told you! One thing’s sure. Joseph Buquet shouldn’t interfere in things – it’ll only bring him bad luck – that’s what Mummy says...”

At that moment they heard footsteps in the passage, followed by a knock on the door. A woman almost fell into the room and, collapsing onto a chair, cried out: “How terrible! What a terrible thing!”

“What’s happened? What’s happened?”

“Joseph Buquet...”

“Joseph Buquet?”

“Dead! He’s dead!”

Exclamations of surprise, fear and horror filled the room.

“They’ve just found him! Hanged² in the third understage³! But the most terrible thing is that the technicians who found his body say that all round the corpse⁴ they could hear a kind of murmuring that sounded like the chanting of the dead!”

“It’s the phantom!” cried little Meg.

“Of course! Of course!” cried all the ballerinas.

Madame Sorelli’s face was pale. She said nothing.

The terrible news went round the Opera House. Everyone was very upset. Joseph was much loved.

The truth about Joseph Buquet’s death was never known. The Police decided that he had committed suicide.

CHAPTER THREE • THE NEW MARGUERITE

Halfway down the stairs Madame Sorelli bumped⁵ into Count Chagny who seemed unusually excited.

“My dear!” he exclaimed, “What a wonderful evening. And Christine Daaé: what a triumph!”

“It’s not possible!” protested Meg. “Six months ago she sang like a crow⁶. Now, let us pass, Count. We want to go and find out about a poor man who’s been found hanged!”

“You know already?” said one of the administrators of the theatre who was passing by at that moment. “Well, please do not tell anybody. We don’t want to ruin our gala night, do we?”

They all hurried down to the foyer which was full of people. The atmosphere was electric. Count Chagny was right. It was a

5. Use your exercise book: you are a journalist for a Paris newspaper. Write an article with the heading:

A MYSTERIOUS DEATH

6. Choose the correct answer:

- a) Joseph Buquet
- ☐ killed himself
 - ☐ killed the Phantom
 - ☐ possibly killed himself
- b) Joseph Buquet
- ☐ wasn’t popular
 - ☐ was very popular
 - ☐ wasn’t loved very much
- c) Count Chagny knew Madame Sorelli
- ☐ very well
 - ☐ quite well
 - ☐ just a little
- d) Christine Daaé’s performance was
- ☐ excellent
 - ☐ terrible
 - ☐ as good as always
- e) The administrators wanted
- ☐ to tell everyone about Joseph’s death
 - ☐ to keep quiet about Joseph’s death until the next day
 - ☐ to tell no one about Joseph’s death

1. **teasing:** making fun of, not serious.

2. **hanged:** killed by putting a rope around the person’s neck (N.B. hung: used for hanging a picture, a coat etc.).

3. **understage:** area under the stage in a theatre.

4. **corpse:** dead body.

5. **bumped (into):** hit against or met, usually by mistake or by chance.

6. **crow:** big black bird that makes an ugly ‘cawing’ sound.