

VALUES FROM AN ANTAGONIST: ERIK'S FAVORABLE CHARACTERS FROM LEROUX'S THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA

Ni Komang Arie Suwastini, Putu Yoga Sathya Pratama

^{1,2}Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha
^{1,2}Jl. Udayana No. 11, Singaraja, Buleleng, Bali
arie.suwastini@undiksha.ac.id

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Abstract: The present study aimed at analyzing round and dynamic characters to look into the various dimensions of the antagonist in Gaston Leroux's *The Phantom of the Opera* and to reveal positive characterizations of an antagonist who is otherwise condemned as inherently evil due to its narrative function. The research was done under textual analysis employing McKee's (2003) as the grounded research design. The data were obtained from Gaston Leroux's Novel (1910), *The Phantom of the Opera*, in which Erik, the main antagonist, was focused the most. The data were gathered through some instruments, including notes and a table of classifications. The present study figures out some of the antagonist's favorable characterizations even when he lived in difficult situations: talented singer, skillful entertainer, tenacious songwriter, and faithful lover. These findings imply that favorable values can be obtained even from the antagonists, rendering readers to be more critical in judging characters.

Keywords: characterizations, the phantom of the opera, antagonist, narrative

Le Fantôme de l'Opéra, known in its English translation as *The Phantom of The Opera*, is a classic novel written by Gaston Leroux, firstly published as a series in a French newspaper, and then published as a novel by Pierre Lafitte in 1910. The novel was written as a detective fiction in a journalistic style, reflecting Leroux's skill in journalism. Leroux was acknowledged as the successor of Alexandre Dumas, the king of French fiction writers (Putri & Khoiri, 2015). Leroux's *The Phantom of The Opera* has been translated into numerous languages, altered into film adaptations, and adapted into musical drama (Lugovtsova, 2017; Putri & Khoiri, 2015).

The Phantom of The Opera is underlined by the theme of "love never dies," as emphasized in

Andrew Lloyd Weber's musical adaptation of the novel (Karali, 2020). The novel's primary setting is 19th-century France, centered on a prominent fictional opera house in Paris. The novel's protagonists were Viscount Raoul de Chagny and Christine Daae, while Erik, or the Phantom of the Opera, was set as the antagonist against the deeply in love couple.

Academically, this novel has been analyzed by researchers from various perspectives. Moura et al., (2018) studied the change in the female protagonist character from a passive damsel in distress to a heroine, marking a departure from the gothic genre in which the novel is written. Angellia (2017), Frazell (2018), Putri & Khoiri (2015), Raharto & Permatasari (2019), and Wardhani (2012) employed psychoanalysis to

explain Erik's motives as an anti-hero. The novel's adaptations have also become subjects of studies, claiming the adaptations of the novels as constant success despite their respective qualities, owing to the strength of the novel's fanfiction (Biancorosso, 2018; Greco & Lopes, 2020; Winkler, 2014). Paz (2015) focused on the compositions of the Medleys in Webber's musical adaptations of the novel, while Karali (2020) revealed that Webber's composition carries emotional cognition in the audience. Meanwhile, Sundström & Jola (2021) were interested in The Phantom of The Opera's effect on Parkinson's patients. Sternfeld (2016) analyzed the paradoxical disability of the main character in Webber's musical, where Erik's disfigured face and his angelic voice pose a unique challenge for a stage adaptation.

It is fascinating how studies on Leroux's The Phantom of the Opera are centered around Erik as the antagonist. Narratively, this fascination is inevitable due to Erik's position as the novel's main character. Indeed, he became the novel's title, marking Erik as the focalization of the story. However, his role was the antagonist, which places him as an anti-hero whose presence was repulsive to the 19th-century audience due to his disfigured face and tainted birth. He was an outcast whose social defect was symbolized through his monstrous face, a physical condition often considered parallel with the person's character. Contrasted with the fair and fragile Christian Daae and the noble handsome Raoul, Vicomte de Chagny, Erik's antagonistic position towards the couple established him as a character with condemnable traits.

Taking the more seldom trodden path in the novel analysis, instead of focusing on his negative portrayal and sinister approaches, the present study seeks out the good lesson from the antagonist character, Erik the Opera Ghost. Although he was the antagonist, the narrative maintains a certain degree of sympathy from other characters, e.g., from Madame Girya and Christine Daae. While Madame Girya's sympathy may have been rooted in a pragmatic standpoint, as Erik gifted her delicacies and currency, Christine Daae's sympathy is more complicated. She was touched by Erik's kindness in mentoring her singing and his gentle treatments, but she was also terrified by his look and his overprotective tempers. Indeed, Christine Daae's

gullible characters further establish Erik as a menacing character, drowning his good traits behind the apparent monstrosity of his apparency and dominance over the opera management.

Discussion around good lessons from novel's characters has been commonly conducted on highlighting protagonist characters (Anindyarini et al., 2017; Arqom & Engliana, 2019; Aryawan et al., 2022; Manjorang et al., 2021; Suwastini et al., 2020; Wulansari & Hidayat, 2020). It seems easier to figure out research around protagonist characterizations to imitate, outnumbering the research on good lessons from antagonist characters; however, a limited number of research is investigating moral values from the antagonist's viewpoint.

The gap was one of the urgencies of conducting this research, presenting divergent discussion that moral value does not only come from the protagonist's character. Moreover, putting more emphasis on the antagonist would let readers figure out the psychological reasons and backgrounds underlying the antagonist's actions, not only the form of crimes conducted. Hence, it was expected to be a medium to trigger critical thinking and caring senses.

METHOD

This writing employed a qualitative approach under McKee's (2003) textual analysis research design. The objective was to reveal values and good lessons to imitate from the antagonist character of The Phantom of The Opera-Erik. The main subject was Gaston Leroux's The Phantom of The Opera, published by Pierre Laie in 1910. However, in the present study, the novel analyzed is the version published by Gramedia Pustaka Utama in 2018. As the primary research instrument, the researchers conducted several data collection techniques, including close reading, note-taking, and triangulating with similar studies.

Erik's characterizations were revealed directly and indirectly through the character's behaviors, actions, thoughts, and other characters' descriptions of Erik. His characters were further categorized into negative and positive characterizations. The collected data were condensed and highlighted into Erik's positive characterizations, closely related to the research objective. The negative

characterizations, on the other hand, were employed as the further comparison and triangulation material. The analysis was done inductively, prior to the cycling pattern processes: data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014), so that the final discussion would be readable and comprehensive.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Finding

This section presents the results of research Leroux's *The Phantom of The Opera* also carries numerous discussions inside, especially regarding the novel's antagonist character. Erik, the antagonist character, was described in detail-making him categorized as a rounded character. Erik was described as unwanted in *The Phantom of The Opera* universe due to his flawed face. His parents had abandoned him since he was born. Erik grew up living from one place to another in an environment marked by rejection and manipulation. These continuities made Erik heartless-as the world had never loved him. Instead, Erik was a figure who strived for the meaning of life despite his presentation as a demon instead of a human being. Erik's past story seems to influence the story's viewpoint from his side enormously. There, the character revelation processes through both direct and indirect quotations have presented Erik's rounded characterizations, namely: sociopathic, oppressive, talented, skillful, tenacious, and faithful character.

To begin with, Erik was categorized as an antagonist because he stood against the protagonist character's goal, Viscount Raoul de Chagny. During the story, Erik and Raoul were rivals to win Christine Daae's love, the major goal of both Erik and Raoul. Most of Erik's actions presented crimes and negative behaviors, leading to a sociopathic and oppressive persona. The oppressive effect created has even been intensely discussed by Putri & Khoiri (2015), displaying Erik as the best villain in Leroux's *The Phantom of The Opera* universe. Erik himself was undoubtedly more related to the antagonist character through these characteristics.

Nevertheless, it is undeniable that Erik's other characterizations, i.e., talent, skillfulness, tenacity, and faithfulness, should also get more

highlights. These characterizations inhibit the protagonist character the most, but Erik, as an antagonist, could possess those positive vibes, making him a unique fictional character. This circumstance makes Erik extremely attractive to discuss, an antagonist character who possesses many recommendable characters.

Talented Singer and Musician

First, Erik was presented as a talented character, especially in singing. Erik was described as having the voice of an angel-no one in *The Phantom of The Opera* universe had been described as him in singing the most. Some proofs showing Erik's talented characterizations are.

Excerpt 1:

He had heard A Man's Voice in the dressing-room, saying, in a curiously masterful tone. (Chapter II-The New Margarita, 37).

In excerpt 1, Erik's existence is revealed indirectly through the perception of another character, most likely the protagonist or another person in the story, as told by the story's narrator. The use of uppercase in "A MAN'S VOICE" emphasizes the importance and authority of the voice being heard. The fact that his voice is described as "masterful" indicates his commanding nature and ability to exert control over situations and individuals. The tone is "curiously masterful," implying a mix of power and mystery.

Excerpt 2:

In the middle of the room stood an enormous table, covered with pamphlets, journals, and such literary production as the Parisian press alone can produce. Erik played. He played like a man who no longer had need of breathing. He played like a man who had seen heaven opened. Christine remained dumb, utterly benumbed, in her place. At the end of a quarter of an hour she rushed out of the room, leaving her adversary triumphant. (Chapter XXII - A Master-Stroke of the Trap-Door Lover, 209).

In excerpt 2, provides insight into Erik's character and his relationship with Christine. Erik could exert a powerful influence over Christine through his music, captivating her with his extraordinary talent. The comparison of Erik's playing to a divine experience suggests that his music possesses a transcendent quality

beyond mere entertainment, touching the very soul of those who hear it. Christine's reaction, described as being "dumb" and "utterly benumbed," illustrates Erik's music's profound impact on her, rendering her incapable of rational thought or action.

Excerpt 3:

As soon as they were alone, Erik turned to Christine, who looked at him with a smile. They were like two lovebirds engaged in a duet. Erik sat down at the piano and felt it with his fingertips. The Ghost, it was said, turned pale. He played the piano with one hand and the violin with the other. Christine, who had only heard him speak, now heard him play the violin, and she felt as though she were in a dream. (Chapter IX-At the Masked Ball, 133).

In excerpt 3, focuses on Erik's character beyond his role as antagonist. Erik had a sensitive and artistic soul despite his intimidating persona and physical flaws. His capacity to make beautiful music contrasts with his darker impulses, highlighting his character's depth. Christine's reaction to Erik's music demonstrates the emotional force of his craft and reveals that there is more to him than meets the eye.

Skillful Entertainer

Aside from being talented, Erik was also presented as a skillful character. He would easily be the opera star if not for his looks because he was the most skilled character in *The Phantom of The Opera* universe. Despite his flaws, Erik grew up to be a great musician, ventriloquist, actor, magician, mentor, hunter, and architect. The most surprising thing about it is that Erik learned those skills self-taught; nobody even wanted to have his existence, so he possessed those abilities without assistance from others.

Erik could produce fantastic music and songs in the novel, even using only a single piano. He produced a poem describing his life in the horrific world-describing his horrible life experience. As he possessed ventriloquist skills, Erik could also perfectly produce sounds in different tones, pitches, and articulations. He managed to create sound to be listened to in different spots-making him able to make a show with only him as the main singer. Moreover, he was a great actor who could play a role without a script and preparation. It was shown during the kidnapping of Christine Daae in

Chapter XV-Christine! Christine! where not a single audience realized it was a different actor. They were numb for being astonished by Erik's acting. Erik seemed well-versed in the art and management of the opera house by only listening to and observing the shows in the Opera House. Some proofs that presented these narrations are:

Excerpt 4:

It's the silliest trick you ever saw," he said, "but it's very useful for breathing and singing in the water. I learned it from the Tonkin pirates, who are able to remain hidden for hours in the beds of the river. (Chapter XXI-Interesting and Instructive Vicissitudes of a Persian in the Cellars of the Opera, 276).

Excerpt 4, shows that Erik directly described himself as having the ventricular skill. This skill enabled him to master any voice, proving him to be the best ventricular in *The Phantom of The Opera* universe. This excerpt also provides insight into Erik's past and the diverse influences that have shaped his character. It highlights his ingenuity, adaptability, and willingness to draw sources of knowledge to achieve his goals. Additionally, it adds depth to Erik's characterization, portraying him as a complex individual with a rich history and a range of skills and abilities.

Not only fascinating in entertainment, Erik also possessed other skills to be a great magician and mentor to his student. Erik could do several tricks, like making himself disappear in the crowd, creating illusion, and playing card tricks. He mostly did these tricks to maintain his mysterious persona, as he realized his true identity was just such a rejection. Erik was described as a great mentor who could train Christine to sing perfectly. Using his magician skill, it became more awesome since Erik trained Christine, never showing his existence, hiding while introducing himself as "The Angel of Music." These portrayals can be observed in some descriptions in the novel, such as.

Excerpt 5:

Here, shall I show you some card-tricks? That will help us to pass a few minutes, while waiting for eleven o'clock to-morrow evening." (Chapter XXIII - The Tortures Begin, 303).

Excerpt 5, shows that Erik performed his skill as a magician in front of Christine. In this

excerpt, Erik suggests showing someone some card tricks to pass the time while waiting for a specific event to occur the following evening. The context of the conversation suggests that Erik was engaging in a casual interaction with another character, possibly in an attempt to distract or entertain them.

Excerpt 6:

About three months...Yes, it's quite three months since he began to give her lessons (Chapter VIII-The Mysterious Brougham, 119).

Excerpt 6, provides insight into Erik's relationship with Christine and his role as a mentor. The narrator's explicit and indirect description tells that Erik could act as a teacher and guide to others despite his reputation as an antagonist. He had been giving Christine lessons for three months, which implies a sustained and ongoing commitment to her education and development. This excerpt also highlights Erik's character's complexity and capacity for darkness and light. Despite his role as an antagonist, it suggests that Erik was not entirely devoid of positive qualities and might possess a genuine desire to help others. It serves as a reminder that individuals are multifaceted and capable of embodying both good and evil, and our biases and preconceptions may influence our perceptions of them.

Another skill he possessed was hunting and architecture. Erik was a master of Punjab Lasso, the skill of using a Middle Eastern-style snare. Although most descriptions showed that he committed this skill for crime, Erik also employed this skill to survive in the past while living in a dangerous place. Erik is also depicted as a great architect whose work might seem impossible to produce by other characters. Erik managed to create a palace with a lake under the opera house alone. It was created as his house and was prepared for Christine Daae when they were married. These could be seen in some descriptions provided by Leroux in the novel, as follows.

Excerpt 7:

I worked the stone, and we jumped into the house which Erik had built himself in the double case of the foundation-walls of the Opera. And this was the easiest thing in the world for him to do, because Erik was one of the chief contractors under Philippe Garnier, the architect of the Opera, and continued to

work by himself when the works were officially suspended, during the war, the siege of Paris and the Commune. (Chapter XXI-Interesting and Instructive Vicissitudes of a Persian in the Cellars of the Opera, 288-289).

Excerpt 7, reveals Erik's authority and abilities beyond his role as an antagonist. Described by other characters' descriptions, this excerpt shows that Erik was not only a brilliant architect but also resourceful and innovative, capable of adapting to changing conditions and continuing his work even during difficult times. Furthermore, Erik's idea of building his house within the Opera's foundation walls demonstrates his creative abilities and audacity. It implies that Erik was capable of designing intricate and concealed areas, underlining his mysterious and enigmatic personality.

Excerpt 8:

No one knows better than he how to throw the Punjab lasso, for he is the king of stranglers even as he is the prince of conjurors (Chapter XXI-Interesting and Instructive Vicissitudes of a Persian in the Cellars of the Opera, 287).

Excerpt 9:

He had lived in India and acquired an incredible skill in the art of strangulation. (Chapter XXI-Interesting and Instructive Vicissitudes of a Persian in the Cellars of the Opera, 287).

These excerpts, 8 and 9, offer insight into Erik's background and abilities, highlighting his proficiency in a particularly dark and lethal skill. The description of Erik as the "king of stranglers" and his acquisition of incredible skill in the art of strangulation suggest that he was not only physically formidable but also possesses a deep understanding of human anatomy and psychology. Furthermore, the mention of Erik having lived in India and acquiring his skill in the art of strangulation there adds depth to his character and suggests a broader cultural context for his abilities.

Tenacious Songwriter

Of all things being explained, it stems from the statement that Erik was a very persistent person. Erik's persistent characterization was described directly and indirectly. Erik himself had described his extreme endurance.

Excerpt 10:

I sometimes work at it for fourteen days and nights together, during which I live on music only, and then I rest for years at a time (Chapter XII-Apollo's Lyre, 174).

Excerpt 10, shows that Erik had confessed that he was a genius at music as well as a workaholic figure with extreme endurance. Erik's endurance enabled him to survive his desperate life. Erik's persistent characterization is the most influential value he showed during the whole storyline-as other characters might not endure life as Erik faced. Erik the Ghost had lived in extreme circumstances even since he was born. As the antagonist character, he was abandoned, rejected, unwanted, manipulated, and faced much distress. Nevertheless, Erik never committed surrender or even thought to end his life by committing suicide.

Faithful Lover

Erik's loving characterization was one of the most respected lessons he presented to readers of Leroux's *The Phantom of The Opera*. Although Erik never achieved love from his parents, society, friends, and women, Erik could accomplish his dream of living with Christine for the sake of her happiness. During the kidnapping of Christine, Erik had never hurt her physically. Erik, indeed, could just easily conduct sexual abuse to Christine, employing his oppressive effect. However, Erik never did that, not even having a thought of doing that. In the last chapter, Erik sets Christine free, letting his first and only love live with the man she had chosen. Erik, who might love Christine Daae more than anyone, had shown a respected action by putting out his own ego and happiness. Erik's loving characterizations are displayed in several descriptions, such as.

Excerpt 11:

He has carried me off for love!...He has imprisoned me with him, underground, for love!...But he respects me: he crawls, he moans, he weeps!... (Chapter XII- Apollo's Lyre, 171).

Excerpt 11, through direct description by Christine, she expresses her realization that Erik has "carried her off for love" and imprisoned her underground out of love. She acknowledges Erik's actions stemming from his feelings for her, noting that despite his imprisonment, he respects

her and demonstrates his love through gestures such as crawling, moaning, and weeping. This excerpt also offers a complex portrayal of Erik's feelings towards Christine and their relationship. Despite the dark and coercive nature of his actions, Christine interprets them as expressions of love rather than mere obsession or possession. Her acknowledgment that Erik "respects" her suggests some degree of mutual understanding and recognition between them, even amid their unconventional and tumultuous relationship.

Excerpt 12:

Erik said: "Well, then, it's quite simple...Christine Daae shall leave this as she pleases and come back again!... Yes, come back again, because she wishes...come back of herself because she loves me for myself!..." (Chapter XXI-Interesting and Instructive Vicissitudes of a Persian in the Cellars of the Opera, 282).

Through direct description in Erik's own words, this excerpt 12, reveals Erik's longing for genuine and mutual love from Christine. Despite his controlling and manipulative behavior throughout the novel, Erik desires a relationship with Christine based on love and free will. He is willing to grant her the freedom to leave if she wishes but hopes she will return to him out of her affection and desire. Furthermore, Erik's insistence on Christine returning because she loves him for himself suggests a deeper ideology for acceptance and validation. Despite his deformities and dark past, Erik longs for someone to love him unconditionally, not because of fear or manipulation but because of who he truly is as a person.

Excerpt 13:

Erik Said: "Then I made her understand that, where she was concerned, I was only a poor dog, ready to die for her...but that she could marry the young man when she pleased, because she had cried with me and mingled her tears with mine! (Chapter XXVI -The End of the Ghost's Love Story, 343).

Through his self-description, in this excerpt 13, Erik expresses his willingness to sacrifice himself for Christine's happiness, describing himself as a "poor dog" who is ready to die for her. He acknowledges that Christine has the freedom to marry another man whenever she pleases, indicating his selflessness and devotion to her. Erik emphasizes the significance of

Christine's empathy and emotional connection with him, highlighting the shared experience of crying together as evidence of their bond.

Discussion

The use of novels in education has been broadly employed and scrutinized through the years (Andrahennadi, 2019; D'Amico, 2020; Novianti, 2017; Schultz, 2020; Sittika et al., 2021; Wallner & Barajas, 2020). Novels carry moral values shared through oral and written forms. Novels are excellent media for sending messages about moral values since it is accessible, interpretative, attractive, and imaginative while at the same time enjoyable and pleasurable (Jayantini et al., 2022; Schultz, 2020; Suwastini et al., 2022).

The statements have described that various lessons can be imitated even in the antagonist character, whose persona is often neglected. The findings suggest that the protagonist character is one of many sources of values to learn from a narrative story. The thing to underline in this writing is that this research does not attempt to promote the antagonist characters' actions to be fully imitated. Instead, it provides a portrayal that scrutinizes the value of the antagonist character, like Erik. It has the potential for readers to gain new insight into a story from a divergent perspective.

First, Erik, the unwanted figure, has taught readers that being talented does not require a perfect face. Someone can keep being talented no matter how difficult his circumstances are. As mentioned in excerpts 1-3, Erik himself was acknowledged by other characters as the perfect singer despite his imperfect appearance. Furthermore, Erik also portrayed that talent should continually be developed intuitively. Although Erik was born with talent, he kept practicing himself to maintain his competence. Compared to real-life circumstances, there might be people giving up on their talent or those who do not improve significantly, although their situation is more favorable than Erik's. Thus, Erik is an excellent example to trigger readers to recognize their talent as a gift that needs to be established, regardless of the barriers encountered.

Second, Erik had just taught readers that having skills was a must as an asset of life. Erik's difficult situations did not limit him from

learning and advancing his skills, as he was also highly intuitive to be skilled. Erik possessed many skills, although he realized he was being rejected by society. At this moment, Erik tried to teach readers that being a skilled individual was done for self-competence and self-value acknowledgment from others would further come by itself. Erik kept filling himself with various knowledge and skills as he knew it was proof that he was still alive and might benefit himself and others. This Erik characterization has just slapped people who possessed better conditions than him yet did not have the firm intention to fill themselves with knowledge and skills.

Third, Erik presented as persistent in living his life and taught readers that surrender was never an option. Studies have revealed that suicide rates are increasing over the years, spreading across countries (Kabugi, 2020; Värnik, 2012). Recently, most of the reasons underlying a person committing suicide are depression, illness, loneliness, financial factors, and conflict (Kabugi, 2020). Derived from those reasons, Erik had faced all of them, even worse, but he managed to continue his life until its end. Moreover, Erik also teaches readers in his persistent characterization that adapting and somehow accepting the world is much better than blaming the world for everything we have faced. Erik's life showed that living is a gift, although it might be full of surprise inside; ending it with suicide humiliates the gifts given.

Fourth, the narrative arc of Erik's story served as an excellent illustration to demonstrate that the most essential aspect of loving someone is making the person we love happy. For the sake of Christine's happiness, which Erik could not provide, Erik allowed his ego to win the battle to claim Christine's affection, which he had fought for years. In light of what occurred, Erik's behavior was highly respectful since he has a high regard for women and was not primarily motivated by his need to meet his needs. Readers may take this as a lesson in not intimidating others into loving them. Erik had just demonstrated that love is more beautiful when it can be understood; he had distinguished loving from hurting by granting Christine's request to marry the person of her choosing as mentioned in excerpts 13-15.

Besides revealing and identifying the excellent lesson from Erik in Leroux's *The*

Phantom of The Opera, the discussion around highlighting the antagonist character has shown a potential to make readers indirectly practice 6C skills, especially critical thinking and connectivity skills. Research around taking good lessons from novel characters is identically related to the character education scope (Arqom & Engliana, 2019; Boyle, 2020; D'Amico, 2020; Manjorang et al., 2021; Novianti, 2017; Sittika et al., 2021; Widodo et al., 2021). The moral, life, lesson, philosophy, and character education learned from the novel or other media is expected to be implemented authentically (Henry, 2013; Novak & Mahmutefedic, 2020). Little did recent research around novel analysis explicitly connect the suitable lessons obtained to discussing essential skills in recent education, including 6C skills (communication, collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, citizenship, and connectivity).

Critical thinking is merely practiced in education through numerical questions, logic tests, and deep reviews of a particular topic (Schut et al., 2019; Suprpto et al., 2017). Little did antagonist character analysis employed to promote critical thinking lately-as even in general, protagonist characters analysis is outnumbering this circumstance. It seems to be another reference for modern teachers, especially English teachers, to enhance students' literacy while at the same time promoting critical thinking in attractive methods (Handayani et al., 2020).

The idea of critical thinking has received much attention since it was initially presented by Jon Dewey around 1910 (Chusni et al., 2020; Letseka & Zireva, 2013). Dewey introduces critical thinking as the attitude of mind, a capability to employ the cognitive capacity to observe, reflect, and think systematically (Chusni et al., 2020). Many experts and researchers have enhanced the ability to think critically over time. Critical thinking is deciding what to believe or do based on reasonable examination and analysis (Aliftika et al., 2021; Çatalbaş & Saritaş, 2022; Suwastini et al., 2023). Critical thinking has been mentioned to have a significant association with problem-solving, which drives the problem-based learning model to arise further and be implemented (Chusni et al., 2020). In addition, critical thinking can motivate someone to determine action rationally (Liu et al., 2021; Nadia & Laksono, 2021).

Thinking critically is now recognized as one of the most essential skills. Because practically every profession in today's world requires the capability to think critically about other people, educational areas have quickly prioritized the development of critical thinking abilities within the learning paradigm (Chusni et al., 2020; Sternberg et al., 2006). In order to handle issues methodically, every profession needs a level of clear and rational thinking, which in turn necessitates the use of critical thinking (Facione, 1990; Possin, 2017; Seventika et al., 2018).

Several dimensions underlined critical thinking, including interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation (Aliftika et al., 2021; Abeden & Siew, 2022). These dimensions have been broadly utilized in recent education to practice students possessing critical thinking skills. Ideal critical thinkers typically have the following characteristics: inquisitive, knowledgeable, belief in reason, open-minded, flexible, fair-minded in evaluation, honest when dealing with personal biases, wise when making judgments, willing to reconsider, explicit about problems, orderly when dealing with complex problems, diligently looking for relevant information, making sense in the selection of criteria, focusing on the investigation, and persistent in finding results that match the subject conditions and circumstances (Chusni et al., 2020).

Connecting to the recent findings, analyzing the antagonist character of a story lets students view an issue from many viewpoints, not only in a linear pattern. Analyzing antagonist characters would trigger readers, especially students, to discover why characters turn into antagonist figures and what factors are underlying their actions-revealing the hidden motive and background that drives them. Students circularly interpret, analyze, and evaluate the characters to determine at what points they could be valued positively. Hence, by practicing the critical values displayed by fictional characters, students are further expected to be able to value someone in an authentic situation, not only from a single dimension but based on various variables and perspectives, to further determine the side of believing.

At the same time, readers would trigger empathy and caring as indicators of connectivity skills by understanding that someone's actions must be underlined by a specific motive

(Qomariyah & Neina, 2020). Readers would learn to avoid easily judging someone before knowing the whole story. Moreover, it also provides readers a medium to feel and imagine the condition encountered by the antagonist character-connecting themselves to the characters' difficulty.

This result references character analysis, especially the antagonist character revelation. Moreover, highlighting the antagonist character of the story has a potential relation to practicing critical thinking and connectivity skills in education. The offered discussion leads to the novel's potential to benefit readers in many aspects. Besides, its primary purpose is to amuse and entertain; reading novels in this discussion provides a medium to practice various skills and learn moral lessons. Although the novel's characters are fictional, it has successfully portrayed the authentic situation that occurred, so learning suitable lessons from them is indeed feasible and acceptable.

CONCLUSIONS

This writing portrays that even an antagonist character of a narrative story could teach readers suitable lessons and moral values to imitate in an authentic situation. Erik, the antagonist character of Leroux's *The Phantom of*

The Opera, had taught readers to be talented singer whose voice was like an angel, skillful entertainer who could perform various arts, a tenacious songwriter who persistently wrote songs for years, and faithful lover who fought for his love.; even in the most challenging situation occurred. Putting more attention on the antagonist character also portrays a potential to be directed in educational situations, especially in practicing critical thinking and connectivity skills. These skills are feasible to practice since the story was viewed from a different perspective, letting readers, whoever is doing the identity analysis, feel and imagine life being an antagonist of the story.

Additionally, conversing with the antagonist character of the story as the main subject was attempted to extend the reference around character analysis, whose data were outnumbered by the protagonist character discussion. This piece of writing is expected to be employed as one of the sources in conducting similar research in the future, specifically in antagonist character analysis. Moreover, it is suggested for further research to scrutinize the critical thinking and connectivity skills practice (as other feasible skills) through analyzing antagonist characters in more rigorous discussion.

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