Gaston Louis Alfred Leroux (6 May 1868 – 15 April 1927) was a French journalist and author of detective fiction. In the English-speaking world, he is best known for writing the novel The Phantom of the Opera (Le Fantôme de l'Opéra, 1910), which has been made into several film and stage productions of the same name, notably the 1925 film starring Lon Chaney, and Andrew Lloyd Webber's 1986 musical. His novel The Mystery of the Yellow Room is also one of the most famous locked-room mysteries ever.

Being French mystery novelist, playwright, journalist, and a prolific feuilletonist, Leroux is best known for his Le Fantôme de l'opéra (1910, The Phantom of the Opera), in which a criminally insane recluse haunts a Paris opera house, and abducts a young and beautiful singer to his cellar retreat. The novel has been a source for several films and stage adaptations, including Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical version, first produced in 1987.

"The Opera ghost really existed. He was not, as was long believed, a creature of the imagination of the artists, the superstition of the managers, or a product of the absurd and impressionable brains of the young ladies of the ballet, their mothers, the box-keepers, the cloak-room attendants or the concierge. Yes, he existed in flesh and blood, although he assumed the complete appearance of a real phantom; that is to say, of a spectral shade." (The Phantom of the Opera)

Gaston Leroux was born in Paris, the son of a wealthy storeowner. He attended school in Normandy and studied law in Paris, receiving his degree in 1889.
After inheriting nearly a million francs, he spent most of his time drinking and gambling. Finding his money gone, Leroux started to work as a theater critic and reporter for L'Écho de Paris. By 1890 Leroux had become a full-time journalist. Between the years 1894 and 1906 he travelled in different countries in Europe, Africa, and Asia as a correspondent. Leroux wrote for the daily newspaper Le Matin and L'echo de Paris and reported amongst other things about the Russian Revolution of 1905. From 1909 Leroux devoted himself entirely to writing, focusing on plays and popular novels of mystery and detection. In 919 Leroux established his own film company called Cinéromans. Leroux died in Nice on April 15/16, 1927, as a result of an acute urinary infection.

Although The Phantom of the Opera is a version of the classic tale 'Beauty and the Beast', the fatal obsession is now music. "Erik was born in a small town not far from Rouen. He was the son of a master mason. He ran away at an early age from his father's house, where his ugliness was a subject of horror and terror to his parents." After years of wandering, Erik hides himself in the corridors and underground locales of the Paris Opera House. He has helped in the reconstruction of its cellars, and incorporated many trapdoors in the building. He falls in love with a young singer, Christiane Daaé, and arranges a series of deaths to advance her career. Raoul, Vicomte de Chagny, is also in love with Christine, but she is forbidden by Erik to respond to his advances. When the Opera managers refuse to make her a star, the unmasking of Erik's evil side leads to his destruction. "'Know,' he shouted, while his throat throbbed and panted like furnace, 'know that I am built up of death from head to foot and that this is a corpse that loves you and adores you and will never, never leave you!..."
The plot is presented as a story pieced together from interviews, revealing the "true" history of the Opera Ghost. In the classic film version from 1925 Lon Chaney was the victim of torture with a crazed mind. Chaney is a composer himself and in his obsession with Mary Philbin, a lovely singer, he drives away the opera's star so that Philbin can have the lead in Faust. Philbin is twice abducted by the Phantom to his secret world. The great moment of the film is when the Phantom is unmasked while playing the organ. As a result of a misfired publicity stunt, the film was banned in Britain for four years. In 1930 a talkie was issued, with some new footage and dialogue which had been recorded by the surviving actors. Arthur Lubin paid a great deal of attention to music in 1943 in his remake - Nelson Eddy, Susanna Foster and Jane Farrar had singing roles. The Phantom of the Paradise (1974) was Brian de Palma's horror comedy-drama about a disfigured musician haunting a contemporary pop palace. The film was poorly received by many critics but attained a large cult following. Susan Kay's novel Phantom (1990) was based on Leroux's work and won the Romantic Novel of the Year Award; Terry Prachett also played with Leroux's ideas in his Maskerade (1995).

Leroux started to write novels in the early 1900s. Between the years 1903 and 1927 he produced two dozen newspaper serials, many shorter works and seven plays. In the UK and the USA Leroux's reputation was long based on his mysteries. His breakthrough work was Le Mystère de la chambre jaune (1907, The Mystery of the Yellow Room), which introduced the teenager crime reporter Joseph Josephson aka Rouletabille, a young journalist with a bullet-shaped head (hence his name). Its plot included one of the first "locked room" murder motifs. Mademoiselle Stangerson is found in The Yellow Room, lying on the floor in the agonies of death. She has cried
"Murder! - murder! - help!" The room is sealed from the inside with a key and bolt, and the blinds on the only window are also fastened on the inside. Rouletabille's friend, Sinclair, chronicles the story, and serves as Rouletabille's own Dr. Watson. The official detective in the case, the least suspected person, is in fact a notorious criminal, who becomes the hero's arch-enemy - later a much used bluff. Le Parfum de la Dame en Noir (1909), the sequel to Le Mystère... also gained popularity, but Le Fantôme de l'opéra, produced from the author's fascination with the Paris Opera House, which really is set above a network of catacombs, was at first only a moderate success.

Later the character of Rouletabille inspired several films. Henri Fescourt's 10-episode serial, Rouletabille chez les bohémes, was made in 1921, starring Gabriel de Gavrone. IstvanSzekely made Rouletabilleaviateur (1932) with Roland Toutain, and Christian Chamborant starred Jean Piat in loose adaptations of Leroux's work, Rouletabillejoueetgagne (1946) and Rouletabillecontre la dame de pique (1947). In the 1960s the hero appeared in France in a television series. One episode was directed by Yves Boisset. Claude Brasseur played the detective under the direction of Jean Kerchbron.

Leroux's other series character was Chéri-Bibi, who appeared in such detective novels as Chéri-Bibi (trans. 1914), Chéri-Bibi: Mystery Man (trans. 1916), Missing Men: The Return of Chéri-Bibi (trans. 1923), and The Dark Road; Further Adventures of Chéri-Bibi (trans. 1924). The first film of ChériBibi was made in 1913, directed by Gérard Bourgeois and starring René Navarre. Charles Kraus directed Les premieres aventures de ChériBibi (1914), starring Emile Keppen: Nouvelle Aurore / Nouvellesaventures des ChériBibi (1919) was directed by
Edouard-Emile Violet, starring José Davert. Léon Mathot continued the adventures with Pierre Fresnay in ChériBibi (1937), and the Italian Marcello (Marcel) Pagliero made ChériBibi / Ilforzatodella Guiana (1955), starring Jean Richard.

Leroux's narrative was fast moving, and he often used complicated plots. In his youth he wrote stories inspired by Alexandre Dumas and Victor Hugo. Later mature work show the influence of Jules Verne and Edgar Allan Poe, especially 'The Masque of the Red Death' (1842) in The Phantom... and the tale 'Thou Art the Man,' in which the detective turns out to be the murderer - the idea appeared again in The Mystery of the Yellow Room. In the novella The Burgled Heart (tr. 1925) Leroux employed supernatural elements - the astral body of a French woman is abducted by an English artist. The Kiss that Killed (tr. 1934) and The Machine to Kill (tr. 1935) featured a vampire and a robot as murderers.
SUMMARY OF THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA

Opera singer Christine triumphs at the gala on the night of the old managers' retirement. Her old childhood friend, Raoul, hears her sing and recalls his love for Christine. At this time, there are rumors of a phantom living at the Opera and he makes himself known to the managers through letters and malevolent acts. Sometime after the gala, the Paris Opera performs Faust, with the prima donna Carlotta playing the lead, against the Phantom's wishes. During the performance, Carlotta loses her voice and the grand chandelier plummets into the audience.

Christine is kidnapped by the phantom and is taken to his home in the cellars of the Opera where he identifies himself as Erik. He plans to keep her there for a few days, hoping she will come to love him. But she causes Erik to change his plans when she unmask...
The following night, Erik kidnaps Christine during a production of Faust and tries to force Christine to marry him. He states that if she refuses, he will use explosives (which he has planted in the cellars) to destroy the entire opera house. Christine refuses, until she realizes that Erik learned of Raoul's attempt to rescue her and has trapped Raoul in a hot torture chamber (along with the Persian, an old acquaintance of Erik who was going to help Raoul). To save them and the people above in the Opera, Christine agrees to marry Erik. Erik initially tries to drown Raoul and the Persian, using the water which would have been used to douse the explosives. But Christine begs and offers to be his "living bride", promising him not to kill herself after becoming his bride, as she had both contemplated and attempted earlier in the novel. Erik eventually rescues Raoul and the Persian from his torture chamber. When Erik is alone with Christine, he lifts his mask to kiss her on her forehead, and is given a kiss back. Erik reveals that he has never received a kiss (not even from his own mother) nor has been allowed to give one and is overcome with emotion. He and Christine then cry together and their tears "mingle". Erik later expresses that he has never felt so close to another human being.

Erik allows the Persian and Raoul to escape, though not before making Christine promise that she will visit him on his death day, and return the gold ring he gave her. He also makes the Persian promise that afterwards he will go to the newspaper and report his death, as he will die soon and will die "of love". Indeed, some time later Christine returns to Erik's lair, buries him somewhere he'll never be found (by Erik's request) and returns the gold ring. Afterwards, a local newspaper runs the simple note: "Erik is dead".