Infatuation is Not Love

The Picture of Dorian Gray is a novel about one’s man descent into darkness through his inability to age or deal with repercussions. Dorian is a character who becomes, essentially, a work of art, with little humanity left in him by the end of the novel. He becomes obsessed with an actress named Sybil Vane in the beginning of the novel, though his love could be viewed as adoration for the art that she represents.

Similarly another novel known as The Phantom of the Opera, by Gaston Leroux, has a lead character who becomes obsessed with a man who teaches her to sing. Both novels take place within the nineteenth century and deal with dark themes of betrayal, murder and one’s own appearance. Though the two novels may not sound similar when comparing a plot synopsis, the way the respective authors treat their primary characters, Dorian and Christine, is remarkably similar.

Dorian Gray is the primary character within the novel and also the obsession of painter Basil Hallward. Hallward uses him as a figure for his latest painting, which is deemed his finest piece of art by his dear friend, Lord Henry. Lord Henry also becomes intrigued by the young man's demeanor and physical appearance, often praising him for his youthful beauty. Dorian Gray is portrayed at the beginning of the novel as extremely impressionable, almost like a blank canvas, as Lord Henry’s simple words of immoral character leave an impression upon Dorian almost immediately. He becomes terrified of growing old and loosing his youthful charm, which is a direct correlation from Lord Henry’s speech about how age can ruin a person.
His terror causes him to declare that he wished the painting would age instead of him, not once but twice within the novel. While he might have not meant the word whole heartedly, his wish is granted, though he does not become aware of it until much later. Since he in essence traded his soul with the painting, he could be considered a metaphorical work of art, for as the novel progresses, he does not age. The painting takes on all the marks of time for him and he remains the same. Throughout the novel, one major theme is Dorian’s deep love for art, which could be an analogy on Wilde’s part for Dorian’s own self love. As he is considered much like a work of art, other works of art have emotional importance to him, while his interest in humanity slowly diminishes. One example of his interest in art over human life would be the case of Sybil Vane.

By the beginning of Chapter four of the novel, Dorian Gray has already begun to be influenced by the nineteenth century version of a rebel, Lord Henry. In this chapter, he announces to Lord Henry that he has no intention of ever marrying, for he is far too much in love. He continues to tell Lord Henry about a Ms. Sybil Vane, an actress who is employed at a low class run Shakespearean theatre. However, the more he talks about his love for the woman, the more apparent it becomes to the reader that Dorian isn’t necessarily in love with Sybil. His words lead the reader to believe that he is in love with her portrayal of the Shakespearean characters and not the women herself. Dorian is asked by Lord Henry when Sybil Vane is Sybil Vane, not Juliet or Rosalind or another theatrical character, to which he replies “Never” (Wilde, 40). His own statements shows the reader how the woman means nothing to him really, though he might not be aware of it himself, and how she is simply the person that embodies a fictional romance that Dorian has convinced himself he is in love with.
Christine Daae, who is the main character of the novel *The Phantom of the Opera*, has a similar situation within her own novel. Christine is a young, orphan who lives at an Opera house in Paris in the nineteenth century. She was the daughter of a skilled musician, who has since passed away, but his talent had seemed to be transferred onto his daughter. When the main singer, La Carlotta, falls ill, Christine is substituted in her place. She is immediately welcomed by the theatre going public, for her approach to the characters is considered innovative compared to that of Carlotta. Her singing skills are also praised and her superiors are slightly shocked by her amazing abilities, for they had never known the girl to be a singer. Investors of the Opera house wondered how the girl had such talent, for she was not known to have a vocal instructor.

As the novel progresses, it becomes apparent that the young girl does have an instructor, an instructor that she has never actually seen. He is known to her as the ‘Angel of Music,’ who she believes was sent to her by her deceased father, since her father had promised to her as a child that he would send the angel to her after he entered heaven. Christine owes all her artistic talent to the Angel of music, who is also a skilled musician. He instructs her through her dressing room wall and she doesn’t question the absurdity of the predicament at first. It is hinted at within the novel that the young girl believes that she is in love with the angel of music. After her captivating performance as Carlotta’s stand in a child hood friend and admirer, Raoul, listens into a conversation within her dressing room.

“Christine, you must love me!” (Leroux, 24), the Angel of Music cries. The girl replies to him with the words “How can you talk like that? *When I sing only for you?*” (Leroux, 24). Her words imply that she believes herself to be in love with him, as she is
upset by his doubt of her affections. But she has never seen the Angel of music, he is simply a voice that speaks to her through her wall and teaches her how to improve her singing. She seems to be simply in love with the idea of him and the knowledge that he has brought her. His tutelage enables her to become a sophisticated and adored singer, which it would be hard for one not to love. She knows him as an Angel of music and since music is an art form, she is not so different from Dorian Gray. Dorian Gray loves the thrill of watching an acting performance while Christine loves the knowledge and experience of music. Both characters are even foolish enough to misplace their emotional appreciation for the arts, believing their feelings to be something much more meaningful. Love for an individual, which neither character really has, as demonstrated by the continuation of each narrative.

After telling Lord Henry about his love for Sybil Vane, Dorian insists that Lord Henry and Basil see her perform, so that they can make their own judgments. Dorian also proceeds to propose to the woman, which is interesting as Dorian had previously told Lord Henry that he doubted he would ever marry. His proposal to Sybil makes the woman experience something that she had always pretended to experience, the feeling of love. Sybil views that since she is now in love with Dorian, there is no need to pretend to fall in love upon the stage every night. The woman does not discuss this decision with Dorian and upon the night that he brings Henry and Basil, she gives a horrible performance. She is approached after the curtain call by Dorian, who is upset about her sudden change in performance. She explains her reasoning to him, seeming so proud of herself.
Dorian, however, is not thrilled with this sudden change in characteristic. He becomes bitter and cruel to the woman, saying how she had killed the love that he had for her by her performance. If the reader had any doubt about Dorian’s true feelings until that point, all doubts should be gone by the events of that scene. Dorian only adored the woman for her amazing acting ability and for the characters that she portrayed. When she turned away from her craft, and was simply Sybil Vane and only Sybil Vane, his interest in her is lost.

Within the narrative of *The Phantom of the Opera*, Christine has a similar situation, though she is no where near as cruel as Dorian. The Angel of music reveals himself to her and she discovers that he is actually a man named Erik, who wears a mask when the two finally meet. He escorts her to his home, which is below the Opera house, by the underground river. It becomes apparent to Christine that Erik, the man who she once believed to be an Angel, was also the source of the Opera Ghost legend. She begins to fear the man, but her infatuation that had begun when he was simply an Angel had not disappeared.

Her interest in Erik only drastically changes when she makes one grave mistake. Erik was completely in love with Christine, so he trusted her. His blind trust in Christine is much like Sybil Vane’s trust in Dorian, neither character is able to comprehend the thought of their beloved betraying the. But just as Dorian betrayed and broke Sybil Vane’s heart, Christine does the same to Erik. Whenever he was around Christine, he wore a mask. Christine’s curiosity gets the better of her and in one moment of bad judgment, she rips the mask from Erik’s face. She quickly regrets the decision, for the
man was horribly disfigured and seemed to be ashamed of his appearance. Erik, broken hearted, threatens to never let Christine leave his underground home.

Christine’s infatuation with the man is shattered in that moment, for he becomes not only a man, but a tortured man in her eyes. She fears his wrath and anger even more so then she had at the beginning of the novel. Her views of him are shattered, for he is no longer the angel of music, no longer the physical representation of art and its opportunities. She, like Dorian Gray, looses interest. She is unable to abandon Erik though, like Dorian, for she becomes his prisoner, even though he lets her return to the Opera house. She becomes a prisoner of worry of what he would do to her if she did not do her bidding, for he had already proven that he did not worry about murder earlier in the novel with the death of Joseph Buquet and the crashing of the enormous chandelier.

Out of pity, Christine tries to live with him in her life, though her pity is also influenced by her fear. She returns to the Opera House, after being missing of and on for several days, she wears a wedding ring upon her hand. Trying to hide it from the sight of her superiors and Raoul, she declares that it is only a present and will speak no more of it. Even prior to this event in the novel, she is seen at the ball whispering the words “Poor Erik” (Leroux, 96). Her timid actions towards Erik, and her willingness to do his wishes, show how she takes pity upon him for his predicament. Dorian has similar feelings of pity once he thinks over the situation of Sybil Vane.

After Dorian exploded upon Sybil for her ill performance, he returned to his home, thinking over the entire night. It is when he returns home that he notices the first change within his portrait, how it looks to be wearing a different expression then it had when it was first painted by Basil. The painting wears an expression of cruelty and he is
shocked by the change. The change in the appearance of the painting makes the man remember what he had said earlier on in the novel about having eternal youth, while the painting would age for him. “I would give my soul for that!” (Wilde, 19) he had stated during his depression. Seeing the change on the painting makes Dorian think about how cruel he had acted to Sybil, so he decides that he will return to her the next day with an apology, for her had made a promise to her that they would be married. He does this out of pity and self preservation, worrying about how people would view him more then whether or not he really loved the girl. Just like Dorian, Christine remained doing Erik’s wishes and by his side out of pity and self preservation, for she was terrified of his vengeance.

But Dorian is too late in his realization to save Sybil Vane. Heartbroken over the rejection of Dorian, Sybil took her own life shortly after Dorian left. Though she was responsible for ending her own life, it was Dorian’s cruelty and inability to love her for who she was that pushed her to that brink. Dorian was in a way, though indirectly, responsible for the death of Sybil Vane, the first of many lives that would end because of the youthful beauty.

Similarly, Christine could be considered the reason for the death of the Opera Ghost, Erik. But unlike Dorian, she was not responsible for his death because of cruelty, but for allowing the man to feel love. Erik had threatened the young girl that she had to marry him, or he would murder Raoul, who Christine realized she was in love with. She does marry the Phantom, but this is not what caused his death. Christine shows Erik an act of kindness, which is not out of pity and this, is too much for the man to bare. Even though Christine does not love Erik, he does love her a great deal. He gives Christine
back her freedom so she could leave and wed Raoul, but this is too much for him to bare.

In one of the final scenes, Erik is speaking to an old friend of his, the Persian, and states “I am dying…of love…That is how it is…I loved her so!” (Leroux, 251). She eventually grants his wish of returning to bury him after he has died and to bury the ring he gave her with him. Erik’s love for Christine lead him to let her go, causing him to die of a broken heart, much like Sybil Vane. Though Sybil Vane took her own life, it was because she was broken hearted. Because of this, Christine and Dorian are similar, for they were both indirectly responsible for killing the once personifications of the thing they loved so much, art.

Though the two novels were written by different authors and with about a twenty year gap between the two, they share similar themes, as well as character construction. Christine and Dorian are both placed into similar situations and scenarios, where they respond in similar ways. Even the characters of Erik and Sybil are similar in the ways that they are treated and how they respond to such treatment. Even though the two novels are drastically different in plot, the similarities connect the two as novels about the love for art being misinterpreted for infatuation of a person.
Works Cited
