



The art of acting in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

A arte dramática no romance de Oscar Wilde O Retrato de Dorian Gray

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Abstract: In his novel **The Picture of Dorian Gray**, Oscar Wilde conceives art and life in a cyclical relationship where life contemplates and recreates art. The art of acting is particularly portrayed in Wilde's novel, which reveals some traits of a theatre play. The narrative is constructed in such way that it resembles the settings of a theatre stage. The main characters, Sybil Vane and Dorian Gray, build their relationship through the art of acting, highlighting how art and life are mingled through their acting.

Keywords: Acting; Theater; Sybil; Dorian; Wilde

Resumo: Em seu romance **O Retrato de Dorian Gray**, Oscar Wilde compreende arte e vida através de uma relação cíclica em que a vida contempla e recria a arte. A arte do teatro está particularmente retratada no romance de Wilde, o qual revela alguns traços de uma peça de teatro. A narrativa é construída de tal forma que lembra os cenários de um palco de teatro. As personagens principais, Sybil Vane e Dorian Gray, constroem o seu relacionamento através da arte do teatro, enfatizando como a arte e a vida se misturam por meio da atuação deles.

Palavras-chaves: Arte dramática; Teatro; Sybil; Dorian; Wilde

Introduction

This article is part of my monograph entitled **Art and Life: An Aesthetical Reading of Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray** submitted in 2009. My aim with this article is to engage in an aesthetical reading of Oscar Wilde's **The Picture of Dorian Gray** in order to examine how art and life are portrayed in the novel through the art of acting. In order to do so, I have divided it into three sections. Firstly, I will provide a brief commentary on Oscar Wilde's biography and the way he conceived art and life. Secondly, I will highlight some theatrical treats present in Wilde's novel. Thirdly, I will point out how the art of acting plays an important role in the relationship of the main characters, Sybil Vane and Dorian Gray. Last, but not least, I will come up with some final considerations.

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1. Oscar Wilde's biography

“One should either be a work of art, or wear a work of art.”
PHRASES AND PHILOSOPHIES FOR THE USE OF THE YOUNG
(CHAMELEON, December, 1894)

The above epigraph captures the desire of a man who wanted to live up to Art. His name was Oscar Wilde, one of the most distinguished writers in literary history. Considering his modality of being, Oscar Wilde may be taken as this man because he made his life an object of art displayed in the gallery of the world. A cultural icon of the late nineteenth century, he drew attention to himself and his works by certain audacities of costume and opinion. As a man of letters, Wilde achieved notoriety and literary reputation. As a man of fashion, he promoted himself as the *arbiter elegantiarum* of Victorian society.

Oscar Wilde studied at Trinity College, in Dublin, and later, with a scholarship, he went to Magdalene College, in Oxford. There, as an Oxford undergraduate student (1874-8), he started his way to a career that granted him pleasure and knowledge, but also trouble because of the subjects that he brought into his works. At Oxford, Wilde met Walter Horatio Pater, the reluctant leader of Aestheticism. Wilde himself was one of the disciples that assembled around Pater and admired his writings of Aestheticism. Being influenced by Pater's views of aesthetic contemplation, Wilde became an outspoken apostle of Aestheticism.

Oscar Wilde's versatility as a playwright, poet, journalist, critic, and theorist also enabled him to promote Aestheticism. At the beginning, Wilde managed to include in his writings more or less subtle references to both of his teachers in Oxford, John Ruskin and Walter Pater. After this period of transition and co-ordination, Wilde came to his own aestheticism. He developed the aesthetic motto “art for art's sake” into a new concept, gave it a new shape, and, finally, applied it to the art of literature working on the relationship between art and life.

Discussing how Oscar Wilde translated himself out of a subject for anecdote into a subject for discussion, Michael Patrick Gillespie (1996, p. 388) states that “the expectations engendered by the ambiguity of Wilde's public

persona disposed Victorian readers and theatergoers to assume the same interpretative freedom in their responses to **The Picture of Dorian Gray**". Gillespie's remark sheds light on the idea that Wilde's novel **The Picture of Dorian Gray** is composed by the polyphony of sounds, notes, rhythms, and melodies.

The polyphony of Wilde's novel is not only heard because his novel is frequently reprinted by publishers (Landmark Publishing House has just published a bilingual version of Wilde's novel in 2009), but also because of the multiple voices of potential interpretation promoted by the pluralistic perspective embraced by studies focused on readings such as psychological, ethical, gothic, and most recently postcolonial, gay and queer theory. Although these voices might form a dissonant choir, they bring to Wilde's novel an academic revival every time a new study is composed.

2. The Art of Acting

The opening paragraph of **The Picture of Dorian Gray** reveals some traits of a theatre play. The narrative is constructed in such way that it resembles the settings of a theatre stage. The studio's atmosphere is described in details and with rich terms full of visual descriptions. The visual and, subsequently, auditory images provide to the reader a full picture of the setting to the reading. Going through the opening paragraphs, the text feels like production notes provided by directors on the first pages of a Libretto. The novel opens in the London studio of Basil Hallward, as the narrator explains:

The studio was filled with the rich odour of roses, and when the light summer wind stirred amidst the trees of the garden there came through the open door the heavy scent of the lilac or the more delicate perfume of the pink-flowering thorn. From the corner of the divan of Persian saddle-bags on which he was lying, smoking, as was his custom, innumerable cigarettes, Lord Henry Wotton could just catch the gleam of the honey-sweet and honey-coloured blossoms of a laburnum [...] making him think of those pallid, jade-faced painters of Tokyo who, through the medium of an art that is necessarily immobile, seek to convey the sense of swiftness and motion [...] In the centre of the room, clamped on to an upright easel, stood the full-length portrait of a young man of extraordinary

personal beauty, and in front of it, some little distance away, was sitting the artist, Basil Hallward, whose sudden disappearance some years ago caused, at the time, such public excitement and gave rise to so many strange conjectures (WILDE, 2003, p. 5).

The description quoted above sheds light on the discussion of The Art of Acting in Wilde's novel. The text is full of elements linked to the theatre. Firstly, the narrator describes the odor and lightning of the setting: "the studio was filled with rich odour of roses when the light summer wind stirred amidst the tree." Secondly, the position of furniture and objects in the setting: "the corner of the divan of Persian saddle-bags [...] in the center of the room clamped on to an upright easel, stood the full-length portrait of a young man". Thirdly, we are informed of the position of the two characters Lord Henry Wotton and Basil Hallward within the scene and what they are doing: "Lord Henry is lying on saddle-bags [...] and Basil Hallward is sitting in front of his work of art".

As the reader engages in the process of reading, it becomes clear that the structural ordering of the chapters in Wilde's novel resembles a diversity of acts and scenes as found in plays, like this: Act/Chapter I: Basil Hallward and Lord Henry talking about Dorian's portrait; Act/Chapter II – Scene 1: Lord Henry meets Dorian; Scene 2: Lord Henry and Dorian in the garden; Scene 3: Basil, Lord Henry and Dorian at Basil's studio; Act/Chapter III – Scene 1: Lord Henry at his uncle's house; Scene 2: Lord Henry at his aunt's house; Act/Chapter IV – Scene 1: Dorian at Lord Henry's house in Mayfair; Scene 2: Lord Henry's monologue; Act/Chapter V – Scene 1: Sybil Vane at her house with her family; Scene 2: Sybil and James Vane at the Park; Scene 3: Sybil and James Vane back to their shabby house on Euston Road.

Moreover, one of the characters, Lord Henry Wotton, is portrayed performing longer monologues. He loves paradoxes and extravagant language. Lord Henry's epigrams such as "Beauty is a form of Genius [...] Experience was of no ethical value. It was merely the name men gave to their mistakes" (WILDE, 2003, p. 57) exemplifies the genre of conversationalists. Furthermore, as Jenny Simeus (2004, p. 21) argues "his [Henry's] lines are much more like

some of the lines of the characters in Wilde's witty plays". Again, these theatrical traits are part of Wilde's attempt to create a beautiful work of art.

All these elements pointed above justify the view that acting plays a part in the story. From the very beginning up to the end of the novel, the reader feels like watching a play. This is not surprising, considering the fact that Oscar Wilde wrote a number of plays such as **Salome** (1891), **Lady Windermere's Fan** (1892), **A Woman of no Importance** (1893), **The Duchess of Padua** (1893), **An Ideal Husband** (1895) and **The Importance of Being Earnest** (1895). It is noteworthy that Wilde's plays have a lot in common with his novel in terms of language, theme and art criticism. For example, in his play **The Duchess of Padua** (1883) the characters endeavor to experience the distinctive and special moment in order to achieve perception regardless of the consequences of their actions might be². Similarly, in **The Picture of Dorian Gray**, the protagonist, Dorian, goes in search of new sensations whose aim is to be experience itself, and not the fruits of experience as sweet or bitter as they might be.

After having established some links between Wilde's novel and the theater, we move to the next two sections in order to explore how the art of acting is portrayed in Oscar Wilde's novel. As we bring out how Wilde works with this art, we will explain how acting plays an important role in the relationship Dorian Gray and Sibyl Vane hold to each other. How does Dorian live out of acting? Is Dorian's acting a dissimulation? How does Sibyl Vane mask herself through her acting? We also intend to demonstrate how the characters' theatrical relation to the social environment compels them to compromise the artistic integrity of their "performance".

² In his essay **Wilde's plays: some lines of influence**, Richard Cave analyzes the persona of Oscar Wilde as a playwright. Cave explores the structure, language, and characters of Wilde's plays. For Cave, Wilde was a dramatist of his time, but also a modern one. As a perceptive theatergoer, Wilde used sources of his time in order to write his plays. However, as a transitional figure, Wilde anticipated developments on poetic drama through the complexity of his characters. Cf. CAVE, Richard Allen. **Wilde's plays: some lines of influence**. In: **The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde**. Homerton College: Cambridge, 1998. p. 219-247.

I. Sybil Vane: Being Actress

The Picture of Dorian Gray proceeds from the studio of an artist, Basil Hallward, who “worships” a young man of extraordinary beauty, Dorian Gray, into the theatre where Dorian, in turn, “worships” a young actress of extraordinary loveliness. This change of scenery takes place when, filled with a wild desire to know everything about life, Dorian Gray goes out in search for some adventure and comes across a third rate theatre. Dorian describes the theatre as an “absurd little place managed by a hideous Jew” (WILDE, 2003, p. 49). In this “*grotesque*” theatre, Dorian meets the romance of his life: Sybil Vane.

In Dorian’s mind, Sybil is the embodiment of all the great heroines in the world. He describes Sybil’s features to Lord Henry as if she were Juliet: “But Juliet! Harry, imagine a girl, hardly seventeen years of age, a little flower-like face, a small Greek head with plaited coils of dark-brown hair, eyes that were violet wells of passion, lips that were like the petals of rose” (WILDE, 2003, p. 50). Afterwards, Dorian confesses that Sybil is everything in his life, and says: “Night after night I go to see her play. One evening she is Rosalind, and the next evening she is Imogen. I have seen her die in the gloom of an Italian tomb, sucking the poison from her lover’s lips...” (WILDE, 2003, p. 51).

Dorian sees Sybil Vane as a personification of Shakespeare’s heroines: Juliet, Rosalind and Imogen. For Dorian, Sybil is a brilliant actress, absolutely and entirely divine, because she simulates love on stage. She takes acting as the one reality of her life and consequently brings to the stage all her passion for life. Life just makes sense to her in the theatre. As Sybil confesses to Dorian, “the painted scenes were my world. I knew nothing but shadows, and I thought them real” (WILDE, 2003, p. 84). She mimics her life through her acting and even considers Dorian a character in a play.

Being dominated by Sybil’s acting, Dorian cannot help going to see Sybil play, “even if it is only for a single act” (WILDE, 2003, p. 54). He gets hungry of her presence and goes to see her acting every night. He describes her artistry as it follows: “As for her acting – well, you [Basil] shall see her to-night. She is simply a born artist. I saw in the dingy box absolutely enthralled. I

forgot that I was in London and in the nineteenth century” (WILDE, 2003, p. 74). When Lord Henry asks Dorian to dine with him, Gray turns Lord Henry down because he is going to watch Sybil’s performance as Imogen and as Juliet. Then, Lord Henry asks: “When is she Sybil Vane?” Curiously, Dorian replies: “Never” (WILDE, 2003, p. 54). Dorian expresses his love for Sybil the stage character, not the performer, as he reaffirms to Basil: “I have been right, Basil, haven’t I, to take my love out of poetry, and to find my wife in Shakespearean’s plays? [...] I have the arms of Rosalind around me, and kissed Juliet on the mouth” (WILDE, 2003, p. 74).

Jenny Siméus (2004, p. 21) explains that “Sybil Vane is representing the concealment of the artist.” This position goes back to Wilde’s Preface to his novel: “to reveal art and conceal the artist is art’s aim” (WILDE, 2003, p. 3). Previously, in Chapter Two of this monograph (see section 2.2), I discussed the same issue of concealment related to Basil’s character. As an artist, Basil knows that if art’s aims are ignored, bad art will result. It is not by chance that Basil is so worried about having put too much of himself in the picture. Sybil does not show this concern because she hides her real identity while performing. In Dorian’s eyes, the reason for Sybil’s brilliance on stage is that there is nothing of her in the characters she plays on stage.

Dorian is so fascinated by Sybil’s acting that he invites Lord Henry and Basil Hallward to the theatre to see her playing Juliet in Shakespeare’s tragedy. Amidst an extraordinary turmoil of applause, Sybil steps on to the stage. At this moment, all the three characters are fascinated by the young actress. Lord Henry sees Sybil as one of the loveliest creatures. Basil begins to applaud her. Motionless, as if he were in a dream, Dorian gazes at her. Finally, Lord Henry completes the vivacity of the scene, murmuring: “Charming, charming!” (WILDE, 2003, p. 80).

However, as Sybil starts to act, the three characters are not impressed with her performance:

She was curiously listless. She showed no sign of joy when her eyes rested on Romeo. The few words she had to speak [...] were spoken in a thoroughly artificial manner. The voice was exquisite, but from the point of view of tone it was absolutely false. It was wrong in

colour. It took away all the life from the verse. It made the passion unreal. [...] she spoke the words as though they conveyed no meaning to her. It was not nervousness. Indeed, so far from being nervous, she was absolutely self-contained. It was simply bad art. She was a complete failure (WILDE, 2003, p. 81).

Basil and Lord Henry cannot bear Sybil's bad acting and leave the theater. Dorian stays until the end of her performance. After the play is over, Dorian rushes behind the scenes into the greenroom. The girl, with a look of triumph, cries: "How badly I acted tonight, Dorian!" [...] 'Horribly!', he answered, gazing at her in amazement" (WILDE, 2003, p. 83). Failing to realize Dorian's reaction, Sybil reveals to him the motif of her bad performance, as she tells Dorian:

Before I knew you, acting was the one reality of my life. It was only in the theatre that I lived. I thought that it was all true. I was Rosalind one night, and Portia other night. The joy of Beatrice was my joy, and the sorrows of Cordelia were mine also. [...] You came – oh, my beautiful love! – And you freed my soul from prison. You taught me what reality really is. To-night, for the first time in my life, I saw through the hollowness, the sham, the silliness of the empty pageant in which I had always played. [...] You had brought me something higher, something of which all art is but reflection. You had made me understand what love really is. [...] I hate the stage. I might mimic a passion that I do not feel, but I cannot mimic one that burns me like fire (WILDE, 2003, p. 84)

Having abandoned her theatrical personalities, Sybil envisions a life of her own. Before knowing Dorian, Sybil had not experienced outside of the realm of art the feelings she was portraying in her acting. After falling in love with Dorian, she feels and experiences love beyond acting, not being able to mimic a passion that burns in her "like fire". Sybil seeks in Dorian understanding of the depth she cannot master herself, but her attempt failures. When her acting abilities fade because of her love for him, Dorian stops loving Sybil: "You had killed my love. You used to stir my imagination. Now you don't even stir my curiosity. [...] You have spoiled the romance of my life. How little you can know

of love, if you say it mars your art! Without your art you are nothing” (WILDE, 2003, p. 85).

Dorian rejects Sybil when she prefers the real Dorian to the fairy-tale Prince Charming. It was the greatest tragedy for Sybil that she had never been herself to Dorian. She was Imogene one day and Juliet on another, but never Sybil Vane. Dorian loved Imogene and Juliet, but never Sybil Vane. Evaluating Sybil's behavior, Siméus (2004, p. 22) points out that “Sybil's miser and suicide was a direct function of her failure to fulfill art's aim and thereby producing good art”.

Christopher Lane (1994, p. 941) *explains that* “Wilde does not indict Sybil for being superficial or inauthentic; he argues that a wooden and inexpressive performance spoils her artistry.” Dorian fell in love with Sybil as embodiment of art in her playing of Shakespeare's characters, not with Sybil as a character in Dorian's life offstage. When she becomes Sybil Vane again he leaves her, and this is why she kills herself. Having lived a whole life playing all the tragic heroines, she ends her life in a tragic way, “like a wonderful ending to a wonderful play” (WILDE, 2003, p. 98), as Dorian Gray puts it.

II. Dorian Gray: Playing Actor

In his essay **Framing Fears, Reading Designs: Homosexual Art of Painting in James, Wilde, and Beerbohm**, Christopher Lane (1994, p. 940) states: “Every individual must put on an act when he or she is assigned to a social role”. Lane's statement sustains the view of Wilde's narrative as a multiplicity through numerous representations of characters. In Wilde's novel, every character plays a part, in Lane's words: “puts on an act” (LANE, 1994, p. 940), either in order to reform their values, to meet evolving conditions or to overcome the counterforce of existing attitudes within an old system of belief.

Mrs. Vane's actions, for instance, are described like “false theatrical gestures that so often become a mode of second nature to a stage-player” (WILDE, 2003, p. 61). Lord Henry plays with his fast talking so that he can enjoy a wicked life vicariously through Dorian. Basil Hallward wishes to live in the pursuit of beauty and pleasure, but he refuses to serve the good from the

beautiful and pleasurable in order to escape from judgment from society. Finally, Dorian is the character who fully lives out of acting, as it will be presented in this section.

Dorian Gray receives his first theatrical lessons from Lord Henry. After Basil finishes his work of art, Lord Henry urges Dorian to see his portrait saying: “Mr. Gray, come over and look at yourself” (WILDE, 2003, p. 26). When Dorian looks at his portrait, he sees the picture of his own ideal self. The portrait is a representation of the man he wants to be. In his search for identity, Dorian misperceives the real nature of his painting and takes a view of beauty as a source of power. Dorian wants to become the portrayed man whose beauty enables him to play actor.

In Chapter II, Dorian is portrayed as a beginner in the art of acting. He is still learning from Lord Henry, “the director”, how to perform on the stage of life: “Be always searching for new sensation” (WILDE, 2003, p. 25), says Lord Henry. At this point, Dorian just echoes Lord Henry’s words, saying: “How sad it is! I shall grow old, and horrible, and dreadful. It will never be older than this particular day of June...” (WILDE, 2003, p. 28). Victoria Wotton, Lord Henry’s wife, detects Dorian parroting Henry’s view when she declares: “Ah! That is one of Harry’s views, isn’t it, Mr. Gray? (WILDE, 2003, p. 46). Thus, Victoria’s comment reveals Dorian to be an empty echo, an actor without a mind of his own.

However, after Dorian becomes fully aware of the power of his beauty, he starts to refashion his acting under the mask of Prince Charming. As Elana Gomel (2004, p. 82) remarks: “He sees in the painting his own ideal self: an image of Prince Charming, a fairy-tale character impervious to change, mutability, aging, and death”. Lord Henry captures Dorian’s acting progress by saying: “How different he was now from the shy, frightened boy he had met in Basil Hallward’s studio! His nature had developed like a flower, had borne blossoms of scarlet flame” (WILDE, 2003, p. 54). From now up to the end of the novel, Dorian Gray – hungry for new sensations – develops his own personal style as Prince Charming.

Curiously, Prince Charming falls in love with an actress, Sybil Vane. Because Sybil is a brilliant actress whose real identity never spoils her acting, he takes her like a goddess: “I love Sybil Vane. I want to place her on a pedestal of gold and to see the world worship the woman who is mine” (WILDE, 2003, p. 75). However, when Sybil’s acting ability fades because of her love for him, Prince Charming stops loving her. Since Sybil has destroyed the illusion that she represented to him of all the heroines of romance, Prince Charming coldly tells the actress: “Without your art you are nothing” (WILDE, 2003, p. 85). As a result of their artistic relationship, Dorian takes Sybil’s death as a fragment of Jacobean tragedy and confesses to Basil: “The girl never really lived, and so she has never really died” (WILDE, 2003, p. 100).

After his tragic experience with the actress Sybil Vane, Prince Charming intensifies his search for new sensations because Sybil’s art fails to fulfill Dorian’s escapism from life into art. In order to find a new way to make life a piece of art work, Dorian flips between the highest and the lowest status of society. He goes to fancy parties hosted by Victorian aristocracy and to the opium dens in London underground. In this way, Dorian’s demand for pleasure compels him to perform a character that is hidden from society’s prying eyes. As Lane (1994, p. 939) claims “Dorian acting enables him to hide from others – and from himself – the acts that fall short of verbal and visual testimony without his being able to rescind their accompanying enigma”. Under assumed name and in disguise, Dorian spends moments “in the sordid room of the little ill-famed tavern near de Docks” (WILDE, 2003, p. 124).

Dorian has decided to live his life according to the New Hedonism, but “since Dorian’s desire is clearly unwritable to the culture he inhabits, he has no alternative but to dissimulate it” (LANE, 1994, p. 11). Hiding himself from the harsh Puritanism of Victorian society, Dorian takes refuge in hidden places where he can safely play being Prince Charming. His youthful and innocent good-looking face makes people around him perceive only what he wants them to see. The narrator says that Dorian’s mode of life “became the chatter of the clubs in London, but people could not believe anything to his dishonor when

they saw him” (WILDE, 2003, p. 124). Here, Dorian is totally making use of his persona, Prince Charming, in addition to his existing personality.

Nonetheless, Dorian’s performance is successful insofar as the public never detects it. As Lane (1994, p. 940) puts it, “good acting veils the tension within subjectivity and the social frame only temporarily”. Although Dorian tries to dissimulate his life of pleasure, he ends up being talked about by Victorian society, as Basil reveals³ to him: “I think it right that you should know that the most dreadful things are being said against you in London” (WILDE, 2003, p. 143). Thus, Dorian starts to get a bad reputation in society after being seen brawling with foreign sailors in a low den in Whitechapel.

Dorian’s performance as Prince Charming fails to keep his drama self-secrecy. As a consequence, the phenomenon of acting becomes tragic to Dorian because he shifts from an ideal (or painterly) identification into an ontological crisis. His pleasure-seeking has gone so far, geographically speaking, that he starts to question himself about his “performance”: “Innocent [Basil’s] blood had been split. What could atone for that? Ah, for that there was no atonement; but though forgiveness was impossible, forgetfulness was possible still...” (WILDE, 2003, p. 176). Dorian tries to evade realizing the situation going to “the coarse brawl, the loathsome den, the crude violence of disordered life, the very vileness of thief and outcast” (WILDE, 2003, p. 178), but he cannot get rid of his failure as an actor. The mask Dorian Gray has chosen to wear as Prince Charming does not suffice any longer.

Final Considerations

In the first level, Wilde’s text reveals to be full of elements linked to the theatre, for example, the structural ordering of the chapters resembling a diversity of acts and scenes found in plays. Furthermore, Lord Henry’s monologues throughout the novel reflect a similar kind of conversation Wilde puts in the lips of his characters in his plays. Lord Henry loves paradoxes and

³ Curiously, Basil Hallward is the character aware of Dorian’s acting from the very beginning. Early in the novel, Chapter II, he recognizes the distinction between Dorian-in-the-painting and Dorian-in-the-flesh. When Dorian abandons his friend for the more fascinating company of Lord Henry, Basil, still in the possession of the picture, declares: “I shall stay with the real Dorian” (WILDE, 2003, p. 31).

extravagant language like some of the characters in Wilde's plays. Thus, Lord Henry's complex conversational lines evoke the dramatic methods used by Wilde to create the character of his witty plays.

Focusing on the role the characters Sybil and Dorian play throughout the novel, we come up with some conclusions. Being actress, Sybil Vane reveals a complex identity that she lives (for the theatergoers she performs) in a theatre stage. As the embodiment of art in her playing of Shakespeare's characters (Juliet, Rosalind, Cordelia, and Beatrice), she lives a myriad lives in one. However, after falling in love with Dorian and learning what love really is, Sybil loses her power as an actress because it is consumed by her love with Dorian. Thus, Sybil turns from the sphere of art (theatre stage) to the sphere of life (the offstage).

As a counterpart of Sybil's acting, Dorian playing as an actor enables him to refashion his life under the mask of Prince Charming. After getting a few "tips" from his mentor, Lord Henry, Dorian finds the first romance of his life: Sybil Vane. Being compelled by Sybil's performance, Dorian wants to make Sybil a piece of art: In this way, Dorian experiences art through Sybil, but such experience lasts for a season because Sybil's acting ability fades as soon as she experiences real-life love. Since Sybil's art is not enough anymore to fulfill Dorian's escapism from life into art, Prince Charming flips between the highest and the lowest status of society in order to find a new way to make life a piece of art work.

The relationship between Sybil Vane and Dorian Gray also raises the issue concerning the crossing point between art and life. On one hand, Sybil experiences life through Dorian. After falling in love with him, she realizes that there is nothing of her in the characters she portrays. Thus, she desires for a life of her own because art is not enough anymore to portray her experiences. On the other hand, Dorian experiences art through Sybil. Running away from the ordinary of life, Dorian finds in Sybil's art the fullness of his own personality. Therefore, the art of acting plays an important role in the relationship Dorian Gray and Sybil Vane hold to each other in Oscar Wilde's **The Picture of Dorian Gray**.

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