# Oscar Wilde's First Manuscript of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

*by*

DONALD L. LAWLER

THERE HAVE BEEN OMENS IN THE PAST TWO DECADES THAT THE long suzerainty of biography, anecdote, and memoir in Oscar Wilde studies may be threatened by a new emphasis upon textual scholarship, critical bibliography, and analytic literary criticism. These new directions should be seen, perhaps, as a sign of the rehabilitation of Oscar Wilde as an important literary figure. Wilde has certainly become respectable as a writer of prose if not of verse and has emerged as one of the major authors of the 1880's and 1890's. It is to be hoped that in the wake of the present revaluation of Wilde's work, there will follow a better and a more balanced assessment of his writing. If this is to be the case, there must be even more attention given to primary scholarship of a bibliographical and textual nature. Such research can offer the literary critic the necessary facts and the accurate texts with which to work. One well-known instance of such a contribution came in 1964 when the Rupert Hart-Davis edition of the Oscar Wilde *Letters* gave us, at last, an accurate text of "De Profundis."[1] The original four act version of *The Importance of Being Earnest* did not come to light in English until Vyvyan Holland

1. Oscar Wilde, *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Rupert Hart-Davis (1962). Other examples of textual scholarship cited above may be mentioned here: Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, ed. Sarah Augusta Dickson, 2 vols (1956); Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Original four act version ed. Vyvyan Holland (1957); Oscar Wilde, *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.* Enlarged Edition, ed. Vyvyan Holland (1958); Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, ed. Wilfried Edener (1964). Other works of interest to Wildean scholarship include Abraham Horodisch, *Oscar Wilde's "Ballad of Reading Gaol." A Bibliocritical Study* (New Preston, Connecticut, 1954); Aatos Ojala, *Aestheticism and Oscar Wilde*, 2 vols. (Helsinki, 1954-55); Stuart Mason [Christopher Sclater Millard], *Bibliography of Oscar Wilde* (1914, 1967); E. San Juan, Jr., *The Art of Oscar Wilde* (1967); L. A. Beaurline, "The Director, The Script, and Author's Revisions: A Critical Problem," *Papers in Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, ed. David M. Knauf (1969), pp. 78-91.

edited a composite text in 1957. Sarah Augusta Dickson's two-volume, 1956 edition of the original four act play manuscript was valuable for reprinting the surviving drafts. The revised and enlarged *Portrait of Mr. W. H.* was not generally available until 1958, and the original, sometimes called the short version of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was practically inaccessible outside the rare book rooms until Wilfred Edener used it as the basis for a critical edition of the novel in 1964.

The Edener edition was only the first step in providing the literary critic with adequate materials for reinterpretation and revaluation of Oscar Wilde's novel. The limited scope of the Edener edition restricted the study to recording variant readings for the two published versions of the novel. The revisions in the manuscripts have never been printed, and as yet, the problems relating to Wilde's intentions and the effects of the revisions remain to be published.[2] In the case of *Dorian Gray* and indeed many other major works by Wilde, collectors happily have preserved manuscripts and typescripts so that comparative studies of the different states of the text may be made. Such studies may reveal more than memoirs, biographies, and letters about the composition of the work and the realized intentions of the author. With this in mind, I offer the following paper as a preliminary study in textual bibliography to a more ambitious inquiry into the significance of the *Dorian Gray* manuscripts.

The text of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* exists in two published states. The novel first appeared as the featured work of fiction in the July, 1890 number of *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*. There are extant two manuscripts for the *Lippincott's Dorian Gray*. The holograph manuscript is at the Pierpont Morgan Library and the corrected typescript is now at the William Andrews Clark Library. In June of 1891, Wilde published *Dorian Gray* in an expanded version. The manuscript of the book version of *Dorian Gray*, published by Ward, Lock and Company, has not been found, if indeed a full manuscript ever existed. Chapters added to the original *Lippincott's Dorian Gray* have turned up here and there over the years: Chapter III and one leaf from Chapter V are in the William Andrews Clark Library. Chapter XV is in the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library. Chapters XIV and XVI, sold at auction in the twenties, are, presumably, still in the hands of private collectors.

2. The revisions and the author's intentions and their effects on the final form of the novel are studied in my own unpublished doctoral dissertation for the University of Chicago, "An Enquiry into Oscar Wilde's Revisions of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*," 1969.

As far as anyone knows, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was begun sometime in 1889. The first allusion to the novel appears in the fragment of a letter Wilde sent to J. M. Stoddart, the editor of *Lippincott's Magazine*, after Stoddart had found one of Wilde's adult fairy tales unsuitable: "I have invented a new story which is better than 'The Fisherman and his Soul,' and I am quite ready to set to work at once on it."[3] The letter is dated 17 December 1889. Subsequent references in later correspondence make it clear that Wilde was referring to *Dorian Gray* in the letter cited above. It is possible, even likely, that Wilde had begun working on the novel earlier than December of 1889. Indeed, there is some evidence to suggest that Wilde had begun work on *Dorian Gray* before October of 1889.[4] At this point, the manuscripts themselves provide the best evidence of the novel's development. The holograph manuscript, thought to be the original of the novel, was revised extensively by Wilde. These revisions affect characterization, setting, action and theme as well as commonplace minor changes in spelling, syntax, and idiom. After the revisions in the holograph were completed, Wilde had the manuscript typed and then made further changes. The revisions in the typescript are as extensive and as significant as those made in the manuscript. It was from this corrected copy of the typescript that *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was set up in type and printed by *Lippincott's*. There is an interval of eleven months between the appearance of *Dorian Gray* in *Lippincott's* and the publication of *Dorian Gray* as a book by Ward, Lock & Co. During that period, Wilde made his final revisions of the novel, and they are the most extensive of all. He added five new chapters, introducing many new characters and continuing with the alterations he had made earlier in atmosphere, theme, and action. The new chapters Wilde added were first written out in longhand. It is not known what procedures Wilde followed for the changes he made in the already published sections of his book. He did not use the original typescript from which the *Lippincott's The Picture of Dorian Gray* was set. If

3. Oscar Wilde, *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Rupert Hart-Davis (1962), p. 251.

4. Horace Wyndham, "Edited by Oscar Wilde," *Twentieth Century*, 163 (May, 1958), p. 400. Wyndham reports that when the decision to drop Wilde as editor of *Woman's World* was made, Wilde remarked, "I shall be able to finish a novel, 'The Picture of Dorian Gray,' I have in the stocks."

Wilde was replaced as editor of *Woman's World* in October of 1889. The fact that he contributed nothing further of his own after June of 1889 is an indication that he was given notice before that date. If this inference is correct, and if we may rely on the substantial if not the literal truth of Wyndham's anecdote, we may assume that Wilde had been at work on *Dorian Gray* before June of 1889.

Wilde followed his customary method of revising, he would have worked from a fresh typescript. However, there is no evidence that, in fact, he did so. The novel, published by Ward, Lock & Co. in June of 1891, represents the final state of the text and, therefore, expresses the author's final intention for his work. Wilde never again made any changes in the text.

In the course of examining the manuscript of *Dorian Gray*, I discovered a number of irregularities in the holograph which indicate the existence of a manuscript version of the novel prior to the earliest one now known. The evidence is, I believe, strong enough to suggest that Wilde, in fact, revised his novel not two but at least three times before its original publication by *Lippincott's*. The evidence I have to present is wholly textual, based on Wilde's handwritten corrections in the manuscript. In classifying the various corrections made by Wilde in the holograph manuscript, I discovered a significant number of cases which could not be explained as arising from simple error, stylistic alteration, or those more substantial changes involving characterization, theme, and action. The corrections I shall investigate fall under the general category of errors emended in the course of writing the manuscript or possibly, in some cases, improvements made during the writing of the holograph. This fact is easily established by the character of the text. Each of the corrections to be discussed is part of the original writing, not added above the line or in the margin during a proofreading. The kind of error and revision to be discussed in this paper has led me to the conclusion that in order to account for them, one is forced to postulate the existence of a still earlier original manuscript for the novel from which Wilde was working more or less closely. In some cases, words, parts of words, or phrases are repeated in a manner suggesting that an error had been made in copying rather than in composition. In other cases there are passages which had been deleted by Wilde from an earlier part of the holograph and moved to a later page or recopied further down on the same page. There is only one instance in which Wilde moved a passage from a later page in the manuscript to an earlier one, an exception which, in this case, does not violate the rule.

It helps us immeasurably to have an example of a text which Wilde is known to have copied so that we may see whether or not errors of the kind found in the holograph manuscript of *Dorian Gray* appear there. We have such a specimen in the very manuscript under discussion. There is one part of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* which is known to have been copied by Wilde from one of his own earlier reviews,

written while he was editor of *Woman's World* from June, 1887 until October, 1889. In November of 1888, about six months before the first reports that Wilde was working on a novel, he wrote a review of Earnest Lefebure's book, *Embroidery and Lace: Their Manufacture and History from the Remotest Antiquity to the Present Day.*[5] A significant part of the review reproduces or paraphrases Lefebure's text. More important for our purposes, when Wilde was scavenging for material to include in Dorian Gray's decadent pleasure house, he transcribed a number of paragraphs into the text of *Dorian Gray* from his old review of Lefebure's book. The self-plagiarism amounts to almost three pages of the holograph manuscript.[6] The leaves in question were copied verbatim from the text of the review, as a simple comparison reveals. In these copied leaves of the novel, there are four or five cases in which Wilde later made stylistic changes in the borrowed passages. However, there is one passage with an error of copying which has a relevance for this study.

He longed to see the curious table napkins wrought for Heliogabalus on which were displayed all the dainties and viands that could be wanted for a feast: the mortuary cloth of King Chilperic with its three hundred golden bees; the fantastic robes that excited the indignation of *King Chilperic* the Bishop of Pontus, and were embroidered. . . .[7]

The repetition of the words "King Chilperic" above (in my italics) is obivously in error. The original passage in the review read, "robes that excited the indignation of the bishop of Pontus."[8] Normally, a slip such as the one above would not be notable or likely to excite curiosity. Indeed, such an error would not be significant at all were it not for the fact that the mistake occurs in a passage known to have been copied by Wilde from his own review published in *Woman's World*, November, 1888.

Instances of similarly repeated phrases or expressions dramatically out of place in the narrative may be cited as evidence that the holograph manuscript is probably a copy of an earlier draft. Such errors, while not frequent, occur throughout the holograph manuscript, indi-

5. Oscar Wilde, *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Padraic Colum, XII (1923), pp. 1-21.

6. Morgan Library Manuscript, ll. 186-188. I wish to thank the Pierpont Morgan Library for permission to examine this manuscript and special thanks go to Herbert Cahoon, curator of the manuscript collection, for his generous assistance.

7. Morgan Manuscript, l. 186. Wilde crossed out the repeated phrase in the manuscript.

8. Wilde, *Complete Works*, p. 11.

cating that any prior ur-manuscript must have been a nearly complete draft of the novel.[9]

He turned to Hallward, and said, "My dear fellow, I have just remembered."
— "Remembered what, Harry?"
— "Where I heard the name of Dorian Gray."
— "Where *I heard the name of* was it' 'asked Hallward, with a slight frown. (l. 26.)

I don't know what my guardians will say. Lord Radley is sure to be furious. I don't care. I shall be of age in less than a year, and then I can do what I like I *don't k* have been right, Basil, haven't I. . . ." (l. 86.)

"Nothing is serious now-a-days, at *Hallward* least, nothing should be." Hallward shook his head as he entered. . . . (l. 205).

In each of the cases cited above, the color tones of the ink in the manuscript indicate that Wilde recognized his mistake at once and lined through the offending words. Wilde wrote the holograph manuscript

9. In the quotations given above and below, each line is reproduced as it appears in the manuscript except that I have italicized the repeated elements. The additional examples of copying error given below will show the reader how these passages are distributed throughout the manuscript.

A. Within the world, as men know it, there was a finer world that only artists know of, — *artists of* artists, or those to whom the temperament of the artist has been given. Creation within—that is what Basil Hallward had named it, that is what he had attained to. (l. 43.)

B. — "Then you shall come. And you will come, too, Basil, won't you?"
— "*Then you and I will*
— "I can't really, I would sooner not. I have a lot of work to do."
— "Well, then, you and I will go alone, Mr. Gray." (l. 51.)

C. The elaborate character of the frame made the picture extremely heavy, and now and then *he put his hand to it so as to help them* in spite of Mr. Ashton who had a true tradesman's dislike of seeing a gentleman doing anything useful he put his hand to it so as to help them. (l. 160.)

D. "Though your sins be as scarlet, yet I will make them white as snow!"
*Suddenly a wild*
— "Those words mean nothing to me, now."
— "Hush! Don't say that. You have done enough evil in your life, My God! don't you see that damned thing leering at us?" Dorian Gray glanced at the picture, and suddenly a wild feeling of hatred for Basil Hallward came over him. (l. 219.)

In passage C above, it appears from the ink tones in the holograph manuscript that Wilde did not line through the expression "he put his hand to it" until later, probably in proofreading. I conclude from the evidence of the lighter color of the ink in the deleted passages and in the contiguous script as compared to the much darker cancel line that the repetition is a result of an anticipation of the phrase rather than merely an improvement in style.

on blue lined folio paper with a steel tipped pen and an India-type ink. Close examination of the manuscript will often reveal the intervals at which the pen was dipped into the ink. In each of the passages above we have an example of one kind of error Wilde is known to have made in copying from his own book review originally written for *Woman's World*.

There are other anomolies in the manuscript which also suggest that they are errors of transcription rather than of composition. I refer to words left incomplete by Wilde and then lined through. Once again, the color tones of the ink reveal that Wilde must have crossed out the incomplete words before going on. I have chosen three representative examples of words left unfinished from different areas of the manuscript.[10]

There was something in his face that made one trust him at once. All YOU the candour of *youth* was there. (l. 30.)

Yes: Basil could have saved him. But it was too late now. REGR The past could always be annihilated. *Regret*, denial of forgetfulness could do that. (l. 156.)

The harsh intervals and shrill discords of barbaric music stirred him at times when Schubert's grace, and Chopin's MI beautiful sorrows, and the *mighty* harmonies of Beethoven himself fell unheeded on his ear. (l. 183.)

Slips of the kind listed above are significant only as evidence which supports the hypothesis that some of the errors made by Wilde in the holograph manuscript were the result of a copying lapse made in the course of working from an earlier manuscript. It seems to me that the features of the manuscript cited above are of a kind that one might expect when one text is copied from another.

There is further evidence I should like to consider before concluding my case in support of the claim that there existed a manuscript anterior to the holograph manuscript now in the Morgan Library. In the course of writing the holograph, Wilde transposed a number of passages forward in the text from an earlier leaf to a later one. Some passages were recopied further down on the same page. One passage was removed from a later to an earlier page, but that exception is revealing because of a change in pagination. These transposed passages are unlike any of the other cases in which Wilde moved phrases, expres-

10. In order to demonstrate the relevance of the incomplete word, it has been necessary to abstract a significant part of the text. I have used upper case letters to indicate the unfinished word and italics to identify the word when it reappears in the text.

sions, or more complex elements around from one place to another because they were not written above the line or in the margin but are integrated in the script. This means that such passages were moved either in the course of copying or of composition. The first lines to be transposed by Wilde were spoken originally by Basil Hallward, the painter of Dorian's portrait, to Lord Henry Wotton, the man who tempts Dorian Gray with his gospel of new Hedonism. Wilde removed the passage from the dialogue of Basil Hallward and replaced it in a meditation by Lord Henry on beauty.

> I tell him that beauty like his is genius, is higher than genius, as it needs no explanation and is one of the great facts of the world, like sunlight or springtime, or the reflection in dark waters of that thin silver shell we call the moon.

Wilde transferred these lines verbatim from leaf 22 of the holograph manuscript to leaf 38. The reason for the change is that the lines are really more appropriate to Lord Henry. Also they represent an early step in reducing the importance of Basil Hallward's role in the novel. This process was continued in the revisions Wilde later made on the completed holograph and carried on in the further revisions through which the novel was put before publication in its final form in 1891. I believe that this particular incidence of transferal may be taken as evidence of a pre-existing manuscript. Had Wilde been composing as he went along, it is doubtful that such a change in the importance and in the role of a character would have been conceived before the first chapter was completed and then forgotten in subsequent chapters, whereas the changes made in later proofreading revisions of the novel reveal a consistent program to expand the characterization of Lord Henry and to reduce the influence of Basil Hallward in the story.

There are three other instances in which Wilde moved material from an earlier to a later position in the manuscript. As was the case above, no alterations were made in the passage and the lines were copied into the text without interruption. In the first of these passages, Dorian is speaking to Basil. It is the scene in which Dorian insists that Basil come with him into his abandoned nursery to see the portrait which Basil had painted many years before. The lines appeared first on manuscript leaf 212, lines 6-9. They were crossed out by Wilde and rewritten as lines 23-25 on the same leaf:

> I will show you my soul. You shall see the thing that you fancy only God can see.

The second repeated passage is a phrase which appeared in the narra-

tor's commentary on leaf 231 of the manuscript, was cancelled by Wilde, and rewritten on the following leaf.

. . . during the eighteen months that their friendship had lasted.

In the manuscript leaf 233, lines 30-31, the following passage is deleted, reappearing again on leaf 234 as lines 8-9. The words are those of Dorian Gray addressed to Alan Campbell, the scientist whose alchemy is enlisted to remove all traces of Basil Hallward's corpse from the upstairs nursery of Dorian's house:

So it is, and to more than one person, Alan.

It is obvious from the character of the manuscript that Wilde transposed the passages in question as he was writing. The question is whether the manuscript in which the passages are rearranged was copied or composed. I think that at this point, we may rely, in part, on the weight of the evidence already presented in favor of the hypothesis that the manuscript is a copy rather than a first draft. Further to support this interpretation of the transposed passages in question, I should like to call the reader's attention to Wilde's own habits of composition. After each revision of a text, Wilde liked to have a clear copy. In the beginning he would make a fair copy of his rough draft himself. Later he would have a typescript made and work from that. I submit that it would have been unusual and uncharacteristic of Wilde to have made the kind of changes shown in the removal of the passages cited above while he was composing. Further, the physical evidence of the ink tones supports the view that the passages were recopied rather than moved during the course of composition. As I have mentioned earlier, since Wilde wrote in India ink with a steel tipped pen, it is often easy to tell at which points the pen was returned to the ink well. The ink in the script becomes lighter just before he refreshed the nib. Now in the instances of the transposed lines, the ink tones indicate that the cancel lines were drawn directly after the lines had been written. What is more, there is no detectable alteration in the ink tones as the passages reappear later in the text. Something of the sort should be expected, unless Wilde's memory were so retentive that he could recall as many as eight lines over sixteen pages of newly composed fiction. Otherwise, there should be some indication that Wilde had paused to relocate his original words in the manuscript.

One final passage deserves consideration. The lines below appear in the manuscript on leaf 27b. Wilde removed one passage from its

original position at the top of leaf 28, made some additions and used it as the conclusion for Chapter One. Basil Hallward is speaking to Lord Henry Wotton. He begins by saying, "Don't take away the one person who makes life

absolutely lovely to me, and that gives my art whatever wonder or charm it possesses. Mind, Harry, I trust you." He spoke very slowly, and the words seemed wrung out of him almost against his will.

"What nonsense you talk," said Lord Henry smiling, and taking Hallward by the arm, he almost led him into the house.

This passage is the only instance I have found in which Wilde moved lines back to an earlier page. It is possible that Wilde made the change in proofreading, having forgotten to designate the beginning of Chapter Two as he composed; or he may have divided up a chapter which proved to be too long. If so, he had to have made the changes before he reached Chapter Four, which is numbered correctly. Once again, the evidence of the ink tones is helpful. There is a close match between the color tone of the ink in the first cancelled lines and the writing at the end of the chapter. Likewise there is a match up between the color tone of the ink in the last lines stricken and the first words recopied on 27b. This seems to indicate that Wilde cancelled the lines on the top of leaf 28 as soon as they were written, that he recopied them with an additional phrase or two on leaf 27b immediately afterward, and that, therefore, he was probably using another text from which he could safely copy his lines.

Of course we have been dealing here with inferences drawn from the corrections made by Wilde in the holograph manuscript of *Dorian Gray*. The evidence leads, I believe, to but one conclusion: that Wilde copied his holograph text now at the Morgan Library from a pre-existing draft. No other hypothesis accounts for the kind of mistake made by Wilde in the holograph and examined in this paper. We must assume that such errors were made in the course of transcription and that the original draft from which the holograph was copied must have covered the entire story since the transcription errors are to be found throughout the manuscript from leaf 22 to leaf 219. Therefore, the original draft was more than merely a working outline. The fact that the errors occur in passages of trivial significance suggests not only that Wilde was more likely to be distracted in copying such material but it implies that the earlier text was more or less a complete draft of the novel as it appears now in the Morgan Library holograph. Finally, we may assume that the original manuscript was probably foul papers, heavily corrected and reworked by the author. That would account for

the trouble Wilde took to make a fair copy of the original. That fair copy, in turn, was extensively altered and rewritten by Wilde.

The significance of all this for Wildean criticism and for textual bibliography is easily seen. At the very least, it means that any future editor of a critical or a scholarly edition of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* should not treat the Morgan Library holograph as the original manuscript. Although it is an invaluable text in its own right, it cannot be taken to reveal all those things about Wilde's original inspiration and shaping of the novel which a first draft would expose. We must also revise upward from two to three the number of times Wilde rewrote his novel before its first publication in *Lippincott's* Magazine. Four full revisions of *Dorian Gray* before the novel took its final form suggest that the stereotyped view of Wilde as a careless and hasty writer may need reassessment. Perhaps a more thorough knowledge of Wilde's work habits would dispel some of the myths, partly self-created, about Wilde's insouciance toward his craft as a writer.

The chances of the original draft of *Dorian Gray* turning up at this late hour do not appear to be good. It is now eighty-two years since Wilde began work on the novel. Not a trace of foul papers or a working manuscript has appeared in the auction room catalogues or in lists describing the holdings of libraries or private collectors. No mention of the original draft appears in the letters or in any of the biographies and reminiscences. It is likely that Wilde himself disposed of the original manuscript. It is also possible that it was lost or destroyed at the time of the infamous auction of Wilde's property from his house at 16 Tite Street, Chelsea, in April of 1895 when the house was thrown open to curiosity seekers and souvenir hunters. At that time, it is said that many manuscripts were taken, and to this day, some have not been recovered. Another, more optimistic view is that the true original manuscript may be in the hands of a private collector or even may be languishing in someone's attic. In any case, the possible existence of another *Dorian Gray* manuscript has a potential value not only for the collector but also for the textual scholar and the literary critic.