The Context of Invention : Suggested Origins of *Dorian Gray*

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Our purpose in studying Wilde's invention of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is somewhat different from that of the conventional source study. Necessarily, it stops short of attempting to weigh and measure all the ingredients which Oscar Wilde combined over the course of the nearly two years of writing and revising that went into the making of *Dorian Gray*. Our interest is limited to the resources available to Wilde in his own writing, till now largely ignored by scholars interested in the novel and its origins. In particular, we want to focus on "The Portrait of Mr. W. H." and "The Fisherman and His Soul," two stories Wilde was writing prior to or as he began writing his only novel. Our intent is to demonstrate that the novel takes its origins from the matrix of ideas out of which Wilde conceived the two shorter stories and that many of its distinctive features as a novel may be traced to these stories. *Dorian Gray* appears to be a masterful reassembling of materials whose full potential had not been realized by Wilde in the earlier works. It seems to us, therefore, that in the elements Wilde extracted from "The Portrait of Mr. W. H." and "The Fisherman and His Soul" we have a sufficient material cause for the basic inspiration of the novel.

The claims made in this paper for the uses Wilde made of his own newly invented materials, fashioned from the two stories, do not necessarily annul those various analogues and hypothetical sources advocated by other critics. But we do say that these materials offer the reader an alternate accounting of the origins and inspiration of the novel which is rather more susceptible of objective study and verification than the largely conjectural and impressionistic analogue studies done until now.[1] Moreover, such an explanation of the genesis

1/Speaking generally, three kinds of source study have been done of the novel. Probably the most popular though perhaps least productive has been the autobiographical approach. Wilde himself encouraged this sort of thing when he wrote in a letter to Ralph Payne on February 12, 1894: "I am so glad you like that strange coloured book of mine: it contains much of me in it. Basil Hallward is what I think I am: Lord Henry what the world thinks me: Dorian what I would like to be—in other ages, perhaps" (Oscar Wilde, *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Rupert Hart-Davis [London, 1962], p. 352. All future references to letters will be taken from this edition). Critics have been fascinated in their turn with the strangely prophetic character of the story for Wilde's life. In Dorian, we find both Wilde's idealized self and an anticipation of two young men with whom Wilde's name was shortly to be linked: John Gray and Alfred Douglas. There have been many false but almost irresistibly good anecdotes which claim to account for the inspiration of the novel in a dozen different ways. They range in cleverness from a scenario reminiscent of the opening chapter of the novel and involving either a Canadian painter, Frances Richards, or an English painter, Basil Ward (take your pick), to Gide's claim that Wilde told him the novel was written on a bet. Some of these claims are properly dismissed by Rupert Croft-Cooke in *The Unrecorded Life of Oscar Wilde* (London, 1972), but the whole subject of myths relating to *Dorian Gray* and other works of Wilde really deserves a study of its own. Critics of a less biographical turn of mind have sought for sources in the more conventional areas of literary history. Huysmans's *A rebours* and Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* were proposed by contemporaries almost at once. A little later critics added Poe's "The Oval Portrait," Charles Robert Maturin's *Melmouth the Wanderer*, Disraeli's *Vivian Gray*, Balzac's *La Peau de Chagrin*, Rachilde's *Monsieur Venus* and *Le Mariage de Chiffon* to the list. The latest new source study suggests Goethe's *Faust*, and there is no sign

of *Dorian Gray* takes more fully into account than do the traditional source studies Wilde's own habits of composition and the sequence of events leading up to the writing, revision, and publication of *Dorian Gray*.[2]

We may begin by reminding ourselves that Wilde was in the habit of borrowing from his own work. He did it all his creative life from the early poems to "De Profundis." Wilde copied almost a page of *Dorian Gray*, for example, from a review he had written in November 1888 when he was editor of *Woman's World*.[3] In turn, *Dorian Gray* was mined by Wilde for some choice epigrams which he incorporated into the plays.[4] Sometimes this art of borrowing amounted

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that the interest in outside sources and analogues for *Dorian Gray* has abated. The third kind of source proposed and studied by critics is Wilde's own work, but this is a neglected area. Except for Hilda Schiff's "Nature and Art in Oscar Wilde's 'The Decay of Lying,'" in *Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association* (New York, 1965), 18:83–102, little attention has been given to it. Instructive comments on parallels in idea and theme between *Intentions* and *Dorian Gray* may be found in Edouard Roditi, *Oscar Wilde* (Norfolk, Conn., 1947), pp. 82–83 and 93; and in Aatos Ojala, *Aestheticism and Oscar Wilde* (Helsinki, 1954), 1:117. Beyond these side glances, there has been no exploration undertaken of the use Wilde made of his own work in the composition of *Dorian Gray*.

2/It will be useful to have a brief chronology of how the stories and the novel were composed, especially since our case for mutual influence has to rest on the pattern of composition during the years 1889–91. The best we can say about *Dorian Gray* is that Wilde began writing it sometime in 1889, perhaps as early as April but no later than December, as the *Letters* reveal. "Mr. W. H." appeared in *Blackwood's* June number of 1889, and during the summer of the same year Wilde was writing "The Fisherman" for *Lippincott's*. The story was rejected by Stoddart, the Lippincott editor, and it did not see print until it appeared in *A House of Pomegranates* in 1891. *Dorian Gray* appeared first in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* in July 1890 and in a second, revised and expanded edition as a book by Ward, Lock and Company in June 1891. While writing and revising *Dorian Gray*, Wilde was also at work revising essays previously published for a collection to be called *Intentions* (1891) and possibly on an enlarged version of "Mr. W. H." It is difficult to say how far Wilde's revision of "Mr. W. H." had come during his work on *Dorian Gray*, but there are some clues that at least some of the enlarged edition was ready. In the fall of 1889 Wilde wrote to Charles Ricketts thanking him for having completed a portrait of Willie Hughes, which Wilde intended to use as a frontispiece for the second edition of "Mr. W. H." Internal evidence suggests that Wilde was probably at work revising both the novel and the story at the same time. That would seem the most reasonable explanation for the close parallels in style and theme between the two. Even so, two years later the enlarged edition was announced by Elkin Matthews and John Lane, Wilde's publishers, as being in "rapid preparation" (*Letters*, p. 366 n.), but not rapid enough, evidently, because that edition never appeared in Wilde's lifetime. It appeared in a limited edition by Mitchell Kennerly (New York, 1921) and is now generally accessible in *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, ed. J. B. Foreman with an introduction by Vyvyan Holland (London, 1966). Except where noted, all references to *Dorian Gray*, "The Portrait of Mr. W. H.," "The Fisherman and His Soul," and the plays are taken from this edition and are cited by page number and title. Whatever the case, we may conclude at least that all three pieces of fiction originated and were written in the year from the spring of 1889 to the spring of 1890. The last revision of *Dorian Gray* was finished a year later in the spring of 1891; and the expanded version of "The Portrait of Mr. W. H." was probably begun sometime in late 1889 or early 1890 but perhaps not completed until 1893 or even later. It was finished by the spring of 1895 because the manuscript of the enlarged edition disappeared from Wilde's home in Chelsea prior to the auction there in April 1895. It did not reappear until Kennerly got hold of it and put it into print for the first time.

3/The review was of Earnest Lefebure's book, *Embroidery and Lace: Their Manufacture and History from the Remotest Antiquity to the Present Day*, and the review is reprinted in Padriac Colum's edition of *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (London, 1923), 12:1–21.

4/As illustration, we would cite the following parallels. Lord Henry Wotton laments "nowadays people know the price of everything and the value of nothing" (*Dorian Gray*, p. 48). In *Lady Windermere's Fan* we hear Lord Darlington use the same phrase in defining a cynic (p. 418).

to little more than a self-plagiarism, and Wilde was often called to account for this by his critics. However, it could also be something far more creative and original, as it was in the case before us.

It would be remiss not to mention at the outset that anyone comparing the three stories would be struck by certain mannerisms of style which are common to them and also to much of the creative writing that Wilde was doing at the time. A stylistic study of Wilde's development as a writer would no doubt establish that there were some rather clearly defined phases in that development as well as certain necessary and consistent traits which help define the character of his style. During this particular phase of his career, Wilde frequently resorted to stock expressions which are found with sometimes tiresome frequency through the two stories and the novel.[5] Such a common vocabulary among these stories gives an emphasis to the point we are making about the state of Wilde's creative imagination at the time he was preparing to write *Dorian Gray*. Those easy repetitions in *Dorian Gray* are indications that Wilde did, in fact, reuse materials which came readily to mind because they had been so recently employed in writing "The Portrait of Mr. W. H." and "The Fisherman and His Soul." That such borrowing may indicate an indolence of imagination or even a lack of artistic integrity is not the point. Such cases of self-appropriation emphasize the fact that Wilde was resynthesizing his material at many levels when he began writing *Dorian Gray* and he continued to do so in the course of his revisions. It is the practice with which we must begin.

Striking as the verbal repetitions may be, they serve primarily to focus our attention on a relationship among three of Wilde's stories: one a novel, another a novelette, and the third a short story. In describing his cast of characters, Wilde works from a limited palette. The lips of the devil in "The Fisherman" are described as "like a proud red flower" (p. 254). Dorian Gray's lips are like rose leaves (p. 19), and Sibyl Vane's are "lips that were like the petals of a rose" (p. 51), "flowerlike lips" (p. 60). In contrast, aged crones like the witch in "The Fisherman" have "dry lips" (p. 253) and so does Sibyl's mother. A characteristic pose of Wilde's youthful and appealing males is reflected in the fisherman sitting idly in his boat listening to the mermaid's song "with lips parted, and eyes dim with wonder" (p. 249). Basil Hallward, the painter, in describing his portrait of Dorian says, "I have caught the effect I wanted—the half-parted lips, and the bright look

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Lady Narborough, who is caricatured in *Dorian Gray* as looking like "an *édition de luxe* of a bad French novel" (p. 136), may be compared with Mrs. Erlynne in *Lady Windermere's Fan*, who is described as looking like "an *édition de luxe* of a wicked French novel" (p. 402). Two years and two plays later, Wilde was still at it, and there are further examples to be found in *An Ideal Husband* and *A Woman of No Importance*. In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Algernon says of himself: "If I am occasionally a little overdressed, I make up for it by being always immensely over-educated" (p. 353). This is an echo of the same epigram applied to a Lord Grotrian mentioned in *Dorian Gray* (p. 138). Lord Henry's cynical observation that Lady Narborough's "hair turned quite gold from grief" over the death of her second husband (p. 136) is repeated by Algernon in reference to the transfiguration of Lady Harbury in similar circumstances.

5/It is also a fact that the stylized vocabulary, the mannered phrasing, and particularly the artificial tone are epidemic throughout the period and were by this time becoming clichés of those who fancied themselves decadents. Perhaps Wilde had more right to use such a style than most others since his prose was one of the influential models of style for the period.

in the eyes" (p. 30). In the case of Dorian, the siren's song has lyrics by Lord Henry Wotton, whose conversation had begun the corruption of Dorian's moral sense. Speaking of Lord Henry, those critics who have emphasized his role as a decadent Mephistopheles will be edified to compare the passage in which the devil is described in the Gothic manner in "The Fisherman" as wearing a Spanish costume with "heavy eyelids drooped over his eyes" (p. 254) to the passage in *Dorian Gray* describing Lord Henry: "As [Dorian] left the room, Lord Henry's eyelids drooped, and he began to think" (p. 55). There is also an obvious parallel of the appearance and the languid manner of the devil in the characteristic poses of Lord Henry.[6]

Similarities among the three narratives in characterization are as dramatic as the verbal parallels and far more important for this study. Certainly, the most significant of the duplications is of the two portraits. They are practically identical except for period costume. In the earlier "Portrait of Mr. W. H.," the painting is described by Erskine as "a full length portrait of a young man in late sixteenth century costume, standing by a table, with his right hand resting on an open book. He seemed about seventeen years of age, and was of quite extraordinary personal beauty, though evidently somewhat effeminate. Indeed had it not been for the dress and the closely cropped hair, one would have said that the face with its dreamy, wistful eyes and its delicate scarlet lips was the face of a girl" (pp. 1150–51). Similarly, as Lord Henry first looks at the portrait of Dorian Gray he sees the "full length portrait of a young man of extraordinary personal beauty" (p. 18), subsequently characterized by Lord Henry as a "Narcissus," and a "brainless, beautiful creature, who should be always here in winter when we have no flowers to look at" (p. 19). Earlier in the same paragraph, Lord Henry exclaims that Dorian "looks as if he were made out of ivory and rose leaves." And

6/There are indeed so many parallels of word and phrasing that it would be inappropriate here to attempt a full inventory of them all. Various parts of the anatomy have their stylized expressions. Throats are reedlike ("he touched the thin reed of her throat" in "The Fisherman" [p. 270], and in *Dorian Gray* it is Sibyl's "reedlike throat" [p. 57]); and ears are shell-like ("Into the shells of his ears he poured the poison wine of his tale" in "The Fisherman" [p. 270]; and again in *Dorian Gray*, "against the shell of her ear broke the waves of worldly cunning" [p. 67]). It may be worth noting some repeated images. Wilde begins two rather important scenes in "Mr. W. H." and *Dorian Gray* with the same image: "It was twelve o'clock when I awoke and the sun was streaming in through the curtains of my room in long dusty beams of tremulous gold" ("Mr. W. H.," p. 1100). "In the slanting beams that streamed through the open doorway, the dust danced and was golden" (*Dorian Gray*, p. 31). In "Mr. W. H.," Wilde writes of "the ivory body of the Bithyan slave [rotting] in the green ooze of the Nile" (p. 1108), while Basil describes one of Dorian's classical poses, "looking into the green, turbid Nile" (p. 9). Phrases, particularly epigrammatic ones, tend to stick in Wilde's mind, as we have seen; and they are either remembered and reused or copied out of one context and into another. In the following example, although the phrase is nearly the same, it is the idea that bears the emphasis: "He [Cyril Graham] once read a paper before our debating society to prove that it was better to be good looking than to be good" ("Mr. W. H.," p. 1091). In the novel, Lord Henry says of Sibyl Vane, "She is better than good—she is beautiful." In either phrase we have an admirable summary of Dorian's philosophy of life. Another phrase has a similar ring to it, with perhaps an equal relevance to a theme in the novel. In "Mr. W. H.," apropos of Cecil Graham's theory of Willie Hughes, we are told that "there is something fatal about the idea" (p. 1099). In *Dorian Gray*, that phrase keeps turning up with a similar emphasis: "There is a fatality about all physical and intellectual distinction" (pp. 4–5), and also: "There is something fatal about a portrait" (p. 121).

later Dorian is described again: "Yes, he was certainly wonderfully handsome, with his finely curved scarlet lips, his frank blue eyes, his crisp golden hair" (p. 27). Erskine reports a similar vision of his own mental picture of Willie Hughes: "I could almost fancy that I saw him standing in the shadow of my room, so well had Shakespeare drawn him, with his golden hair, tender flower-like grace, his dreamy deep sunken eyes, his delicate mobile limbs, and his white lily hands" (p. 1169).

It is as though the same model had stood for both imaginary portraits so vividly realized in each story. The portraits display effeminate, handsome young males with virtually identical features, and the style of portraiture is calculated to emphasize Wilde's androgynous ideal of youthful beauty. Clearly this idealization of youth in "Mr. W. H." and *Dorian Gray* is homosexual in its tone and character. Ultimately, it brought ruin upon its author. How oddly prophetic it was that Wilde should have penned these two portraits just before meeting Alfred Douglas, the youth who came to epitomize for him that very ideal. Although Edward Carson used *Dorian Gray* against Wilde in the Queensbury trial, it was the appearance of "Mr. W. H." the year before the novel was published that had put the critics on the scent. In each case a beautiful youth is adored by an artist: Willie Hughes is adored by Shakespeare as Dorian is adored by Basil Hallward. Cyril Graham, the martyred only begetter of the Willie Hughes hypothesis, also shares Hughes's features and personal charm; and their effect on others is the same. Erskine says of Cyril, "He fascinated everybody who was worth fascinating and a great many people who were not" ("Mr. W. H.," p. 1153).[7] The impact of Dorian Gray's good looks is similarly described: "there was something about Dorian that charmed everybody" (p. 97), and later, "The wonderful beauty that had so fascinated Basil Hallward, and many others besides him, seemed never to leave him" (p. 102).[8] The fascination takes on a special meaning for art in each story. As Basil explains to Lord Henry his true feelings for Dorian, echoes may be heard of passages that Wilde was to add later in the expanded edition of "Mr. W. H.": "The new manner in art, the fresh mode of looking at life suggested so strangely by the merely visible presence of one who was unconscious of it all. . . . He remembered something like it in history. Was it not Plato, that artist in thought, who had first analysed it? Was it not Buonarotti who had carved it in the coloured marbles of a sonnet sequence?" (p. 41). And

7/This similarity between Cyril and Dorian is not only in appearance, it is also in their ancestry and childhood. Cyril's father and mother were both dead and so were Dorian's. Cyril's mother like Dorian's was the only daughter of a nobleman who disapproved of the marriage because in each case the woman had married a commoner. Cyril's parents had died in a yachting accident, while Dorian's father was slain in a duel. Dorian and Cyril were each cared for by the maternal grandfather, a crusty, disagreeable, Tory who did not care for his young ward; and in turn, neither Cyril nor Dorian got along with his guardian.

8/The original, *Lippincott's* edition of the novel has "boyish beauty" (p. 65). This similarity is further emphasized in two passages written at or near the same time. The first from the *Lippincott's Dorian Gray* was deleted in the revised edition. The speaker is Basil: "I know that if I spoke to Dorian, I would become absolutely devoted to him, and I ought not to speak to him" (p. 7). The second is from "Mr. W. H." and is in the original edition. The speaker is Erskine, and he says of Cyril: "I was absurdly devoted to him; I suppose because we were so different in some things" ("Mr. W. H.," in *The Works of Oscar Wilde*, ed. G. F. Maine [London, 1948], p. 109).

further on in the novel, Dorian understands, "The love that he bore him—for it was really love—had nothing in it that was not noble and intellectual. It was not that mere physical admiration of beauty that is born of the senses and that dies when the senses tire. It was such love as Michael Angelo had known, and Montaigne, and Winckelmann, and Shakespeare himself" (p. 97). When Oscar Wilde expanded "Mr. W. H.," he added substantially to its length, including whole sections in which the theme of love and Platonic friendship is explored:

> There was, however, more in his friendship than the mere delight of a dramatist in one who helps him achieve his end. This was indeed a subtle element of pleasure, if not of passion, and a noble basis for an artistic comradeship. But it was not all that the Sonnets revealed to us. There was something beyond. There was the soul as well as the language, of neo-Platonism. . . . There was a mystical transference of the expressions of the physical world to a sphere that was spiritual, that was removed from gross bodily appetite, and in which the soul was Lord. Love had, indeed, entered the olive garden of the new Academe, but he wore the same flame-coloured raiment, and had the same words of passion on his lips.
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> Michael Angelo, the "haughtiest spirit in Italy" as he has been called, addressed the young Tommaso Cavalieri in such fervent and passionate terms that some thought the sonnets in question must have been intended for [a] noble lady. . . . ["Mr. W. H.," pp. 1174–76]

In succeeding paragraphs, Wilde introduces Montaigne, the sonnets of Shakespeare, and "a romantic friendship with a young Roman of his day [which] initiated Winckelmann into the secret of Greek art, and taught him the mystery of its beauty and the meaning of its form" (p. 1177).

This theme is further developed in each work as Wilde emphasizes the esthetic importance of the Greek ideal of friendship for the artist and for art: "I saw that the love that Shakespeare bore him was the love of a musician for some delicate instrument on which he delights to play, as a sculptor's love for some rare and exquisite material that suggests a new form of plastic beauty, a new mode of plastic expression ("Mr. W. H.," p. 1173). In *Dorian Gray* the theme is given similar treatment.[9] Basil speaks to Lord Henry:

> I sometimes think, Harry, that there are only two eras of any importance in the history of the world. The first is the appearance of a medium for art, and the second is the appearance of a new personality for art also. What the invention of oil painting was to the Venetians, the face of Antinoüs was to late Greek sculpture, and the face of Dorian Gray will someday be to me. . . . But in some curious way—I wonder, will you understand me?—his personality has suggested to me an entirely new manner in art, an entirely new mode of style. [P. 24][10]

9/In the original version of "Mr. W. H.," printed in *Blackwood's* magazine and reprinted in the G. F. Maine edition, Wilde had, perhaps, anticipated his later development of this theme both in *Dorian Gray* and in the enlarged edition of "Mr. W. H." in the following passage which refers to Willie Hughes: "So it had been with others whose beauty had given a new creative impulse to the age" (p. 1108).

10/Such parallels amounting virtually to a paraphrase of the same thought content and angle of vision reinforce a point made earlier. If we are to think in terms of the conventional influence of one work upon another, we are forced to conclude that the theme of neo-Platonic ideals of friendship and their inspiration of esthetic forms has its origin in "The Portrait of Mr. W. H.," reappears in *Dorian Gray*, and receives its fullest treatment and justification in the enlarged, revised version of the former story. The matter of influence, therefore, at least as regards this case, seems to be reciprocal.

A related point needs to be made here about the motif of the influence of one personality or temperament over another. It is a major theme in both *Dorian Gray* and "Mr. W. H." To some extent, at least, the business of influence and dominance grows out of the nexus of ideas related to neo-Platonism, hedonism, and an essentially esthetic orientation of life. In "Mr. W. H." the theme provides a key to one of several of the central ironies of the plot:

> It seemed to me that I had given away my capacity for belief in the Willie Hughes theory of the Sonnets, that something had gone out of me, as it were, and that I was perfectly indifferent to the whole subject. What was it that had happened? It is difficult to say. Perhaps by finding perfect expression for a passion, I had exhausted the passion itself. Emotional forces, like the forces of physical life, have their positive limitations. Perhaps the mere effort to convert anyone to a theory involves some form of renunciation of the power of credence. Influence is simply a transference of personality, a mode of giving away what is most precious to one's self, and its exercise produces a sense, and it may be a reality of loss. [P. 1196]

The last sentence was added in the expanded version and doubtless owes much to the treatment of the theme in *Dorian Gray* where it occupies an even more prominent place. There it defines the triangular relationship among Basil, Lord Henry, and Dorian; and in addition it reinforces the Doppelgänger motif, which is, perhaps, the central motif of the novel. In *Dorian Gray*, the spokesman for this point of view is Lord Henry, whose influence over Dorian is fatal:

> "There is no such thing as a good influence, Mr. Gray. All influence is immoral—immoral from the scientific point of view."
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> "Why?"
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> "Because to influence another person is to give him one's own soul. He does not think his natural thoughts or with his natural passions. His virtues are not real to him. His sins, if there are such things as sins, are borrowed. He becomes an echo of someone else's music, an actor of a part that had not been written for him. The aim of life is self-development. To realize one's own nature perfectly—that is what each of us is here for." [Pp. 28–29]

An echo of this last sentence is heard in "Mr. W. H." where it is said of Shakespeare that he "realized his own perfection as an artist and his full humanity as a man on the ideal plane of stage writing and stage playing" (p. 1164).

Such remarkable parallels in phrasing and thought point up once again the breadth and the depth of the similarities we have been emphasizing among the stories and the novel. But our interest in the similarities of character and theme between *Dorian Gray* and "Mr. W. H." has perhaps obscured the importance of the role played by "The Fisherman and His Soul," noted earlier in this study. Let us turn our attention back to "The Fisherman" for the last step of our demonstration.

The one feature of *Dorian Gray* above all others that holds its fascination undiminished for the reader after almost a century is the magical portrait in which Dorian's soul lives. It is emblematic of the conscience he has cast out of himself on the fatal day that he wished the portrait would age instead of the man and the wish was granted. All or most of the theories about the novel's origin focus on possible sources for the motif of the symbolic portrait. Wilde may have been influenced by other writers on a conscious or an unconscious level, but we do

not have to look farther than his own imagination for a fresh model. We have seen that Wilde had already invented a portrait in "Mr. W. H." which is identical in almost every detail with the one in *Dorian Gray*. The idea of making the portrait the mirror of Dorian's soul comes from "The Fisherman and His Soul." In that story, the fisherman learns from a mermaid of whom he is enamored that the only way he may live with her and the sea people is to lose his human soul. The fisherman learns how this may be done from a witch: "What men call the shadow of the body is not the shadow of the body, but is the body of the Soul. Stand on the sea-shore with thy back toward the moon and cut away from around thy feet thy shadow, which is thy Soul's body, and bid thy Soul leave thee and it will do so" (p. 255). We note a similar treatment of thought in *Dorian Gray:*

> Soul and body, body and soul—how mysterious they were! There was animalism in the soul, and the body had its moments of spirituality. The senses could refine, and the intellect could degrade. Who could say where the fleshly impulse ceased, or the physical impulse began. How shallow were the arbitrary definitions of ordinary psychologists! And yet how difficult to decide between the claims of the various schools! Was the soul a shadow seated in the house of sin? Or was the body really in the soul, as Giordano Bruno thought? The separation from matter was a mystery, and the union of spirit from matter was a mystery also. [P. 56]

The point of emphasis is slightly different, but the original insights from which they have developed are the same. The unique inspiration that produced *Dorian Gray* seems to be the result of uniting the Doppelgänger motif of "The Fisherman" with the portrait of a young man of extraordinary personal beauty taken from "Mr. W. H." In "The Fisherman" it is the desire for the mermaid that moves the young man to wish his soul away. In *Dorian Gray* the hero is more like the narcissistic youth of "Mr. W. H." and wishes for a personal exemption from growing old, transferring that process instead to the painting at the cost of his soul.[11]

After the fisherman cuts away his soul and sends it from him, he goes to live with the mermaid at the bottom of the sea. However, at each anniversary of the separation the soul returns to recount its adventures in the world and to try to tempt the fisherman away from the life of a merman. We have a similar case in *Dorian Gray*, in which the portrait dramatizes by its changed appearances the misadventures of Dorian's soul.

Just before the fisherman sends his soul away, it begs for his heart; but he refuses. The soul without a heart, therefore, becomes increasingly evil; and when it finally tempts the fisherman away from his beloved mermaid with a promise of seeing a dancing girl, the heartless soul, now an evil soul, leads the fisherman into first cruelty then murder. When the fisherman asks why the soul has done this to him the soul answers, "When thou didst send me forth into the world

11/The similarity of the portrait to the fisherman's shadow is not merely an attributed one. The fisherman's shadow, which is the body of the soul, constitutes the Doppelgänger in the story. It gives to the soul a separate, independent life, which turns out to be a scandal to the fisherman and ultimately destructive to him. The soul of Dorian also is separated from him in the emblematic portrait, which is described variously in the novel as the "mirror of his soul" (pp. 88, 166) and the "face of his soul" (p. 122). Dorian refers to the portrait at the novel's end as his "monstrous soul-life" (p. 167).

thou gavest me no heart, so I learned to do all these things and love them," and the soul adds, "Be at peace, for there is no pain that thou shalt not give away, nor any pleasure that thou shalt not perceive" (p. 267). Dorian Gray likewise is led into cruelty and then murder after bartering away his soul. Increasingly, Dorian is inclined toward evil either in defiance of the portrait's judgment upon him or out of curiosity to see what the portrait will reveal next about the growing depravity of his soul. Heartlessness is foreshadowed in Dorian's remark to Lord Henry: "When you see Sibyl Vane you will feel that the man who could wrong her would be a beast, a beast without a heart" (p. 68). This utterance early in the novel introduces one of the principal themes of the story, destined to come to the surface again and again. During the fatal interview with Dorian, Basil Hallward complains, "You talk as if you had no heart, no pity in you" (p. 90), and finally, as the novel draws to a close, Dorian confesses to Lord Henry, "The memory of the [portrait] is hateful to me. Why do you talk of it? It used to remind me of those curious lines in some play—Hamlet I think—how do they run?—'Like the painting of a sorrow, a face without a heart'" (p. 161).

Even the strange and powerful conclusion of *Dorian Gray* seems to have been anticipated in the earlier story. When the fisherman learns that his soul is evil, he tries to cut away his shadow once again but learns that there is some unexplained prohibition against it. He is told that "once in his life may a man send his soul away, but he who receiveth back his soul must keep it with him forever, and this is his punishment and his reward" (p. 268). At this the fisherman, weeping bitterly, resolves that, although the evil soul has reentered his body, it will not reenter his heart. His love for the mermaid is proof against the evil soul. When, after a year of waiting, the fisherman discovers the mermaid's corpse washed ashore, his heart breaks "as through the fullness of his love" (p. 271). At the moment of heartbreak, his soul, seeing its chance, finds an entrance to the fisherman's heart; and with that, he dies. Dorian seems to undergo a similar although necessarily more grotesque transformation. As he stabs the picture, body and soul are rejoined. When he is found dead in the room the painting has regained its original beauty; and the soul of Dorian Gray has carried its hideous burden back with it into his body. Here then we have the probable source or the initial working out of the main argument of the plot in *Dorian Gray*, and we have before us what appears to be the sufficient cause of the Doppelgänger theme in the novel as well as a foreshadowing of the mysterious manner in which Dorian Gray's attempted murder of his portrait becomes, in fact, a suicide which restores the human soul to its rightful place.

The evidence we have considered seems to us to establish several important conclusions. First, at the least, "The Fisherman and His Soul" and "The Portrait of Mr. W. H." should be considered sources from which Wilde drew in composing and revising *Dorian Gray*. In most cases the close parallels were probably unconscious borrowings. However, the relationship is even more remarkable than the influence of one literary text upon another. The way in which Wilde seems to have synthesized the materials of his two earlier narratives suggests a developmental process taking place in the working of the author's creative imagination. This is not to deny that he used other stories in a conscious or an

unconscious manner as sources, for the evidence suggests that he did. But the influence seems to be more germinal than elaborative. In the reworking of his fund of ideas in the three stories, we find not a slavish imitation or weak-minded self-plagiarism by Wilde but an admirably inspired inventiveness in drawing out the full potential of his materials. If it is not too strong a claim to make for the case we have presented, we seem to be touching close to the nerve center of Wilde's imaginative processes which were actively in ferment during that period, and we may catch a glimpse of the creative practice of a writer nearing the peak of his powers. In the case of *Dorian Gray*, it seems almost that Wilde had to work up some of the elements of theme and characterization found in "The Portrait" and "The Fisherman" before he was prepared to write his immortal novel. As it were, his work upon the two shorter narratives helped to generate the context of invention out of which his fantastic novel began to assume both its shape and its character.

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