Volume 25 Issue 2
Originally issued as A1

Global Journal of Human-Social Science: A
Arts & Humanities - Psychology
Volume 25 Issue 1 Version 1.0 Year 2025
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals
Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

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GJHSS-A Classification: *LCC: PR5818*



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Dahlia Kashmiry

Introduction

An Ideal Husband is a four-act play by Oscar Wilde written in 1895. The play revolves around political corruption, power and ambition, perceptions of honour, success, and love, and the dilemma of morality. The play proved to be an immediate success. As the 19th-century society was obsessed with the mania for morality, a communal trend emerged for everyone to pose as a paragon of virtue, purity, and incorruptibility. The image of idealism is promoted with no tolerance for human frailties. Such a trend opposes human nature and the purpose for which God has created this world. The play depicts corrupt politics and social life, a moral society where illicit love affairs flourish in secret, "Not a year passes in England without somebody disappearing. Scandals used to lend charm, or at least interest, to a man – now they crush him" (*An Ideal Husband,* 28). Though the play is classified as a comedy, it deals with serious issues.

The description of the Octagon room at Sir Robert Chiltern's house in Grosvenor Square refers to a powerful and wealthy society. The artistic decoration reflects an appreciative sense of art, but a predominant ambiance of appearances, as much as the houses are luxuriously decorated so are elaborate women's dresses, while men wear plain clothes. Wilde adroitly crafted the room's description at the beginning of Act I Scene I to portray aestheticism and the dandy society and present the allegedly love-based marriage between Sir Robert Chiltern and his wife, Lady Chiltern. The room is brilliantly lighted and is full of guests. There is a great chandelier with wax lights illuminating a French tapestry and just close to it stands Lady Chiltern with her glowing Greek beauty receiving guests. Wilde skillfully ties the decoration's beauty and grandeur with that of Lady Chiltern. 18th-century tapestry carries The Triumph of Love, in Renaissance art it is a popular theme representing the triumphal procession of the goddess of love. It was painted by Francois Boucher, 1740. It allegorizes the triumph of love over power. It foreshadows the theme of the play. Love is triumphant at the end. Venus stands in victory pointing to Vulcan's conquered heart.

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The painting carries multiple paintings and is used in different places in the play with different significances. Yet, for our purpose, we focus on its symbolism with regard to the conjugal relationship between Sir Robert Chiltern and his wife. The painting is ironically employed in this scene. It denotes the failure of the presumed love of Lady Chiltern to her husband. The couple conceives that their love is genuine, however, it has been a love of the perceived idealism in both. The presumed love has collapsed at the first critical crisis encountered by the couple while their idealistic image has been disfigured. With the unfolding events, natural human frailties are unveiled and the apparently idealistic wife refuses her husband whom she has once dignified for his expressed idealism. It is an idealistic love that has not yet experienced a hard test. True love is based on the acceptance of imperfections and weaknesses. Strong love is only triumphant and remains perpetual when it safely overcomes raging waves storming both lovers. Chiltern as a perceptible unmistakable idealistic wife that is, paradoxically, the actual defect in her personality. Wilde depicts Mrs. Cheveley as a foil to Lady Chiltern. Mrs. Cheveley is an explicit example of malice, opportunism, and lack of honour, however, Lady Chiltern in her full idealism fails to prove her sincere love to her husband at the first dilemma between them. As the play deals with the impossibility of the "ideal", it is equally impossible to be idealistic and to sense true love while one cannot comprehend true love as acceptance of one partner's frailties from an idealistic perspective. Thus, through Mrs. Cheveley, the imperfect, Lady Chiltern learns how to sense love. As they have decided to accept one another truly, the concept of illusionary love subsides, and true love supersedes. They have become the sphere and make possible a livable life; a life of compromises.

Oscar Wilde disapproves of the utilitarian values of his age. As he embraced aestheticism, he subverted the societal norms and the superficial appearances of the Victorian era. In his essay "The Artist as Critic" he labours on his view of aestheticism versus morality:

> The artistic critic, like the mystic, is an antinomian always. To be good, according to the vulgar standards of goodness, is obviously quite easy. It merely requires a certain amount of sordid terror, a certain lack of imaginative thought, and a certain low passion for middleclass respectability. Aesthetics are higher than ethics. They belong to a more spiritual sphere. To discern the beauty of a thing is the finest point to which we can arrive. Even a colour-sense is more

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> important, in the development of the individual, than a sense of right and wrong. Aesthetics, in fact, are to Ethics in the sphere of conscious civilization, what, in the sphere of external world, sexual is to natural selection. Ethics, like natural selection, make existence possible. Aesthetics, like sexual selection, make life lovely and wonderful,. ... And when we reach the true culture that is our aim, we attain to that perfection of which the saints have dreamed, the perfection of those to whom sin is impossible, not because they make the renunciations of the ascetic, but because they can do everything they wish without hurt to the soul, and can wish for nothing that can do the soul harm, the soul being an entity so divine that it is able to transform into elements of richer experience…. (406)

Aestheticism was central to dandyism who is the embodiment of the subversion of such shallow values and morals. Aestheticism is one stream of dandyism that used to be regarded as a performance expressing and acting aristocracy. In the 19th century, the main principle of the aesthetic movement was "art for art's sake" void of any purposeful message. Biebie Guan in her article, "Oscar Wilde's Aestheticism", argued that "A dandy's only mission was to be himself, and to develop an extraordinary and elegant self-image" (25).

An eye cannot miss a dandy who pays obsessive attention to his/her appearance. In a further definition of a dandy, in his book *Selected Writings on Art and Literature,* Charles Baudelaire says that "- [t]he dandy…stands on an isolated pedestal of self… The dandy has neither obligations nor attachments…no occupation, and no obvious source of support…The dandy's achievement is simply to be himself" (16). A dandy is supposed to have no purpose in life. Throughout the play, there is a mocking humor about the purpose of education which "puts one almost on a level with the commercial classes" (*An Ideal Husband,* 5), Guan further expatiates on this point:

> During the reign of Victoria, in the United Kingdom, the word morality was frequently discussed. Everything was judged by a moral standard. Morals were used to defend social norms. However, if art was judged by this standard too, it loses its independence and power of attraction, going against the principle that all art is freedom. Thus Pater and Ruskin launched the aesthetic movement to defend the independence of arts. Wilde thought that society was the origin and foundation of morals, but the sphere of art and ethics were distinct and separate. He emphasized that morals are used to confine society, and art does not belong to society. This kind of thought goes beyond Victorian traditional morals which are hypocritical, stubborn and full of strict ethical codes. (26)

Art is amoral and has its own independent value, which is what is firmly held by Wilde. He elucidated that "Artists should not have ethical sympathies because – aesthetics are higher than ethics. They belong to a moral spiritual sphere. To discern the beauty of a thing is the finest point to which we can arrive" (*The Works of Oscar Wilde,* 997).

Wilde defended his work of art when criticized that his works contained evil qualities and are antimoral by arguing that the spheres of art and ethics are totally different, so it would be inappropriate if a moral standard judges art. Literature creates its own sense of beauty away from the social norms. In his view morality fails to ennoble men's hearts, instead it teaches them hypocrisy. Therefore, morality is useful "only to hypocritical high society, but no value to literature". Art's role is to transcend morals, underpinning the dandy's attitude to the relationship between art and morality (Guan, 27).

In *An Ideal Husband,* there are no definite boundaries between vice and virtue; the image is further blurred. The division between good and evil is fuzzy. Sir Robert Chiltern committed an immoral act when he divulged a national secret. Such an abhorrent act made him an important politician, an influential figure in the state, and a prestigious one. Wilde is critical of social morality and disapproves of traditional bourgeois morality. Mrs. Cheveley was his means of criticism though, the only true person in this society who explicitly expresses her perverse morals, unscrupulously uses loathsome ways of threatening Sir Robert Chiltern. She tells him, "Remember to what a point your Puritanism in England has brought you. Nowadays, with our modern mania for morality, everyone has to pose a paragon of purity, incorruptibility, and all the other seven deadly virtues – and what is the result? You go all over like ninepins – One after other" (*An Ideal Husband,* 28). Wilde's main focus, in such works, was to expose the irrationality of established moralities and celebrate those who want to atone for their crimes. It was unreasonable to absorb the amount of severance and cruelty produced by these traditional and social moralities.

Wilde held that artists are creators of beauty whose primary purpose is to pursue beauty and not morals. For him, there is neither a moral nor immoral book. Books are either good or bad, wellwritten or poorly written. Wilde expounded that "Art is not dependent on morals of existence. It has its own independent life and value. However, we need to be clear that in this sentence, - immoral means amoral, which means that art does not contain morals. So artists can and should express everything, whether vice or virtue" (*The Works of Oscar Wilde,* 997).

Dandy's aesthetic use was intended to explore and explain immoral, wrongful acts, wickedness, corruption, slander, crime, and vices to find humanity in evil. Lord Goring is the first to recognize the malicious aims of Mrs. Cheveley. At that time, such an approach was shocking and appalling, for it subverted all customary aesthetic norms the society used to pursue and the image of selfrighteousness and idealism. For Wilde, evil may come out of kindness, and good comes out of evil, "a kind of rebellion and a subversion of the moral values of bourgeoisie" (Guan, 27). In such a

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notorious society, barely a year could pass without a scandal.

Sir Robert Chiltern, though a sinner, understands more his wife's position and never questions her fidelity because he truly loves her. He tells her "Gertrude, Gertrude, you are to me the white image of all good things, and sin can never touch you" (*An Ideal Husband,* 121). His giving and understanding soul is shaped by a sin he has committed in the past and has elicited some humane traits that would have never existed in an immaculate person. Experience can create more compassion only in persons who have a kind nature and slip into sins unintentionally "I am of clay like other men" said Sir Robert Chiltern (84). Lady Chiltern, in contrast, is unable to forgive her husband and understand his situation, at first she rejects him for his sole mistake; "A horrible painted mask!... You put yourself up to sale to the highest bidder!" (69), until she is trapped and faces disgrace. By then, she begins to learn true love, how to love, forgive, and live in compromise with what life has offered her:

> A man's life is of more value than a woman's. It has larger issues, wider scope, greater ambitions. Our lives revolve in curves of emotions. It is upon lines of intellect that a man's life progresses. I have just learnt this, and much else with it, from Lord Goring. And I will not spoil your life for you, nor see you spoil it as a sacrifice to me, a useless sacrifice!. (118)

This discernment has allowed her to understand the hermeneutics of love and the transition from subjectivity to objectivity, however their reciprocal love becomes subjective when they are both united as one whole.

Lady Chiltern is a young lady who is intensely conscious of her beauty "who proclaims that the world is really a glorious world for women who can see its glory and men who can act its romance!" (British Drama, 26). These are all taken at face value. "By creating identification" the spectators' romantic imagination is contested "in revealing the pretentious unreality of the characters' ideals" (26). Lady Chiltern is a woman of "the very highest principles . . . has a very ennobling effect on life" (*An Ideal Husband,* 30), nonetheless principles are not sufficient, feelings should come in to form humanism and shape both the sense of subjectivity and objectivity of a soul.

Here are the hermeneutics of situations. Morals that are not didactically imposed but instead discerned and perceived. It is the aesthetics of art, as Wilde advocated. Beibei Guan illustrated this idea in her paper, saying:

> Art is a system in itself and for itself. He [Wilde] does not agree that art is heteronymous, that is, correlated with other things. In his eyes, art is hostile to the age, which contains two connotations: on the one hand, art reflects itself rather than the age; on the other hand, what art shows is quite the opposite of the spirit of the age. Regarding art history, sometimes art has to return to the past, and at other times it has to go ahead before the age. (29)

Wilde focused his literary work on the reality of the inner world as Guan argued (28). His aim was to reveal the human self. The dandy's view of the world is equally similar to Wilde's. Meanwhile, Wilde maintained that human beings should enjoy their lives and youth. They have to love and feel beauty because life is short and things are limited.

Lord Goring is a dandy, philosopher, mild-mannered social critic, and an idle bachelor who seeks pleasure and enjoys doing nothing, though he is fond of exploring the truth of human relationships and holds to morals. However, described as "good-for nothing" by his father, Lord Caversham, he is the determinate character in the play who decides the end and causes a paramount shift in the attitudes of both the hero and the heroine. He is perfectly described by Wilde in the stage directions as:

> Thirty four but always says he is younger. A well-bred expressionless face. He is clever but would not like to be thought so. A flawless dandy, he would be annoyed if he were considered romantic. He plays with life, and is on perfectly good terms with the world. He is fond of being misunderstood. It gives him a post of vantage. (*An Ideal Husband,* XXIV)

Lord Goring, as a dandy, his main activities are riding in the Row at ten o'clock in the morning, goes to the Opera three times a week, changes his clothes at least five times a day, and dines out every night of the season. However, he is "clever, but would not like to be thought so. A flawless dandy,. ... He plays with life, and is on perfectly good terms with the world. He is fond of being misunderstood. It gives him a post of vantage" (*An Ideal Husband,* 14-15).

An Ideal Husband is an intellectual play mocking the seriousness of English society. The party held at Chiltern's house depicts the "Anglomania" of the English lifestyle in the 19th century Victorian age. London society is sarcastically described as "has immensely improved. It is entirely composed now of beautiful idiots and brilliant lunatics. Just what Society should be" (*An Ideal Husband,* 7). Lord Goring carries the trademark of a dandy that is love of idleness and enjoys doing nothing, "I love talking about nothing, father. It is the only thing I know anything about"(18).

Lord Goring displays the qualities and activities of a dandy that shall be used to influence the reformation of the two main characters in the play. Though Lord Goring is an exemplification of a dandy, he is an objective man whose wisdom harmonized the fraught between Sir Robert Chiltern and his wife Lady Chiltern and neutralized the wickedness of Mrs. Cheveley such an "unnatural woman" who has a "horrid combination" of being genius in the daytime and a beauty at night. Graham Price described Wilde's dandy

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in his book, *Oscar Wilde and Contemporary Irish Drama,* saying; "They live by the anarchic rules of comedy and refuse to allow their worlds to atrophy because of seriousness and earnestness" (161).

Wilde was firmly against the hypocrisy and sanctimoniousness characterizing the 19th-century upper class in England, "decorating itself with morality and elegance but immoral in mind" (Guan, 29). He alludes as well to the rising rate of crime and over-crowdedness in city slums as he speaks of "a proper scheme of assisted emigration" (*An Ideal Husband,* 61). He equally hints at the rise of businessmen and the past and ill-reputation of Mrs. Cheveley when he criticizes a dreadfully mixed society and children's ingratitude to their parents.

Lord Goring "uses language and artistry to mould the world around him according to his individual perceptions and desires. [He] refuse[s] to take the so-called serious things of life seriously and use mockery to undermine any of the sacred cows in their worlds" (Graham, 161). This is the typical form of resistance to typology and social conventions by a dandy. He "use[s] it consistently to puncture the dictatorial earnestness of those around [him]"(161).

Wilde uses witty epigrams very fondly in this play. He also makes a perfect utilization of paradoxes. The genuine interpretation of the play is inferred from Wilde's genius use of paradox, description, cynicism, and indeed his dandy.

The use of paradox by a dandy as Kohl notes "that their style of epigrammatic compression gives striking form to their ostentatious dismissal of established current views of reality, and by this means they demonstrate their intellectual superiority, conceal their own opinions, and leave themselves latitude to escape all commitment" (228). In addition, "The dandy's work has his unique charm demonstrated in his distinguished conversations: the dandy is adept at combining epigrams with paradoxes. He gives the reader a fresh and new feeling. This new comic form, emphasizing dramatic language, reflected Wilde's creativity" (Guan, 29).

As to hermeneutics, a text is independent and alienated from its timeline context. It is not to be understood as an expression of life at a specific time but as what it communicates and says. So, understanding a text does not mean reflecting on the past but understanding it in the present. Understanding is a sharing between a reader and an author, present and past.

Hans-Georg Gadamer, in his article "Language as Determination of the Hermeneutic Object", drew a picture of this sense when he mentioned that "All writing is as we have said, a kind of alienated speech, and its signs need to be transformed back into speech and meaning. Because the meaning has undergone a kind of self-alienation through being written down, this transformation back is the real hermeneutical task. The meaning of what has been said is to be stated anew, simply on the basis of the words passed on by means of the written signs" (107). In this connection, Wilde's presents humanistic themes viable and substantial for mankind. His main concern was social reform, "nowadays people marry as often as they can", refers to the question of divorce and the reform of relevant laws. "There is nothing like race" (8) is a mock of the belief of descending from good families. For Wilde, the sense of bragging about families is not as important as being a genuine intellectual person because at that time dukes have inherited feeblemindedness. "It is not the Prime Minister's day for seeing the unemployed" (104) was a serious issue in the 1880's as much as it is today. "Women are not meant to judge us, but to forgive us when we need forgiveness", Lord Goring is the spokesperson for Wilde's views and ideas in this play. Here, Wilde addresses his own wife as he relays a message to all wives. "scourge him with rods" (143), echoes the scourging of Christ before his crucification.

The sentiments Wilde demonstrated in *An Ideal Husband* are universal and valid for all times and places. The meaning is transcendental and is not confined to an age therefore, it is felt and interpreted by people everywhere and across ages. Aesthetics and morals are both needed for humankind's continuity. An artist's job is not to lecture the audience but to relay a vivid experience they can learn from. Such an experience is realistic, touching their hearts, emotions, and daily life situations. Feelings of love, forgiveness, disgrace, shame, greed, contentment, etc., are all exemplified and incarnated in every reader's soul. The dilemma of ethics and beauty is eternal. Nonetheless, Wilde deliberately left it unresolved and ambiguous triggering an endless intellectual argument and vocation for human pursuit.

The intention is to judge and ridicule 19th-century convention and moral generalization so as to present to the audience new-dressed perceptions, i.e. "old facts in a new light" (*Innes,* 25). The moral clichés of the century are challenged.

Gadamer, nonetheless added that in contrast to the spoken word, one can find no helpful tool for interpreting the written word. Thus, the "art of writing" in this sense, is the clue, because the spoken word can be interpreted by the way of speaking, the tone of voice, the tempo, etc. and by the circumstances in which they were spoken. He continued arguing that:

> All writing claims that it can be awakened into spoken language, and this claim to autonomy of meaning goes so far that even an authentic reading, e.g. the reading of a poem by the poet, becomes questionable if the direction of our listening takes us away from what our understanding should really be concerned with…What is stated in the text must be detached from all contingent factors and grasped in its full identity, in which alone it has validity. Thus, precisely because it entirely detaches the sense of what is said from the person saying it, the written word makes the

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> reader, in his understanding of it, the arbiter of its claim to truth. The reader experiences in all its validity what is addressed to him and what he understands. What he understands is always more than an alien meaning it is always possible truth. This is what emerges from the detachment of what is spoken from the speaker and from the permanence that writing bestows. This is the deeper hermeneutical reason for the fact…that it does not occur to people who are not used to reading that what is written down could be wrong, since anything written seems to them like a document that is self-authenticating. (107)

But Wilde's play's specific historical and cultural context does not limit its universality. The play raises undying themes such as devotion, loyalty, integrity, forgiveness, sacrifice, etc. These human traits make the text eternal, though there are some specificities of the age and the English society and culture, the main theme lasts across age and is debatable.

It is ethical, and the meaning of a text must be interpreted into its original meaning as well as its anachronistic meaning. Language and cultures do evolve, and the text would remain static and dead if it was not reborn in its origin and new shape. "The counterproductive multiplication of the revenge ethic, the limits of controlling society through force, or the need for realism in a ruler are universal truths" (Innes, 24-25).

An interpreter of a text interprets its determinate meaning. Significance is also a meaning if related to something else. "Thus, while meaning is a principle of stability in an interpretation, significance embraces a principle of change" E.D. Hirsch, Jr. argued in his article "Three Dimensions of Hermeneutics" (Hirsch, 111).

The principle of historicity, according to him, poses that "Adherents to Heidegger's metaphysics take the view that all attempts accurately to reconstruct past meanings are doomed to failure since not just our texts but also our understandings are historical.... Interpreters make the best of our historicity not by reconstructing an alien world from our texts but by interpreting them within our own world and making them speak to us . . ." (111).

In this sense, interpretation is determined by the ideas of a particular time and does not express universal truth. "It also implies that from a historical perspective, the views of the past have been superseded" (Innes, 23).

In his view, this principle holds that the process of understanding is necessarily circular because a whole cannot be known unless some of its constituent parts are known and identified, and the same thing applies to the parts, we cannot know the parts without knowing the whole that determines their functions. It is further added that our world is a pre-given experience. Therefore, our historical world is but constitutive of our textual interpretation.

The horizon for understanding a text is neither restricted to the original meaning the writer had in mind nor to the addressees the writer originally intended. A text is immortal and valid to all ages, yet its original meaning must be invoked for a better understanding of the present. It is argued that:

> We saw that literature is defined by the will to hand on. But a person who copies and passes on is doing it for his own contemporaries. Thus the reference to the original reader, like that to the meaning of the author, seems to offer only a very crude historics–hermeneutical criterion which cannot really limit the horizon of a text's meaning. What is fixed in writing has detached itself from the contingency of its origin and its author and made itself free for new relationships. Normative concepts such as the author's meaning or the original reader's understanding represent in fact only an empty space that is filled from time to time in understanding" (Gadamer, 108).

For this reason ". . ., we need a norm precisely because the nature of a text is to have no meaning except that which an interpreter wills into existence" (109). It is we who are the makers of the meaning and not the texts, that is how we bring the text again into being through our understanding; "a text being only an occasion for meaning, in itself an ambitious form devoid of the consciousness where meaning abides" (Hirsch, 109).

However, some dramaturgs as Brecht use staging devices that remove the illusion of reality from the performance and alienate the audience from being immersed in emotions. In doing so, he incorporates multiple narrative devices such as songs or direct addresses to the audience, i.e. audience engagement. In Wilde's play, it is the dandy who directs characters and comments on the dramatic development of the events without being submerged in intense emotions. Wilde's technique to maintain emotional detachment from his dandy is meant not to affect his ability to think and act rationally and to give objective views to the audience. The audience who are partially engaged, as they receive didacticism and are morally instructed through the dandy, start to reconsider their morals and social values and embark on a process of self-criticism. Hence, they move from objectivity to subjectivity. So, Wilde's message is transcendental from the general to the particular, from time-bound to time-free, from targeted society to universal ones, and is interpreted in the variant context it is transmitted to.

In her article, "An Ideal Husband, or An Ideal Wife? That is the Question", Masha Zayani & Farideh Pourgiv explained that "According to Mill, suppressing an idea was a gross mistake since that idea may represent the truth and to simply deny this is to fall into an even bigger error of amusing 'our own infallibility'" (32).

Only by a collision of adverse beliefs, truth has been presented. If the social scene is controlled by determinate prejudice rules, no truth shall ever be expected to be witnessed in a society nor any real

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transition from social dogma or heartfelt conviction to reason and affection and personal experience shall ever be sensed. No real growth of affectations and collective empathy can be nurtured without thoughtful consideration and acceptance of human weaknesses.

The social status quo at the end is the same as it has been at the beginning. The social order is restored. It is the raisoneur's job to put all characters in order. How Goring diffuses it. Wilde is writing a very reactionary piece of theatre. The marriage is restored and is threatened by an outsider is put back together again in *An Ideal Husband.* It is not a classical play in the traditional sense, but rather a realistic fictional play with Greek undertones.

Anne Varty, in her video on "A Well-made Play", elucidated that the progressive reading of the play – would be that although the external realities are all reconfirmed, the terms on which all these relationships are developed and continued are changed. Lady Chiltern has moved from her Puritan position of fixed morality to understand that an evil be more complex than she has initially believed to be.

A woman with a past was a prevailing theme in 19th-century theatre. It is related to the woman's question. Through Mrs. Cheveley the social position of women can be explored. She acts as a foil to the virtuous Puritan lady Chiltern and to the dandy, she is morally unconventional and threatens other characters with their past.

In the video "A Woman with A Past", Varty further expounded Wilde is pushing back against the doctrines of naturalism (the idea that only natural laws and forces operate in the universe as opposed to supernatural ones) and determinism (views that all events in the universe like human decisions, actions, and fates are casually inevitable). Naturalism is based on the whole trinity of the burden of the past, the burden of the environment, and the burden of the pressure of the present. That completely determines an individual's life and which robes them of moral agency, the possibility to choose to be good or evil. How can one resist this overwhelming power of the past and when it is appropriate or inappropriate to do it?

Mrs. Cheveley chooses to be evil; she has no choice. The way in which Wilde perceives to counter the past or brings an alternative philosophical position into the worldview to resist naturalism and determinism and lack of moral agency is through the figure of the dandy and the gospel of love, which Goring as a dandy is charged to deliver in this play. That is the way the past is defeated by increased knowledge and a greater sense of compassion and empathy.

The dandy comes from France, an outsider, an observer, somebody who moves through the crowd in the city observing it, and is seeking to understand modernity, urban life in its speed and haste and being immersed in the moment of sensation. A dandy could be the means through which Wilde can comment on the social values, the social morals of the play without being absorbed by them. He uses articulate figures with an epigram in order to satirize, provoke, and re-observe the society they are moving through. At a certain point, a dandy becomes embroiled in the plot; then they lose their outsider status and their pertinence as a social commentator. Goring maintains this status until the very end.

He resists utilitarianism. He is an intellectual spirit offering an ideal masculinity that does not depend on wealth, productivity or any kind of naturalism. For Wilde, he reaches a higher state of spiritual identity. Being was a higher state than doing. His interest in clothes and wit are complementary as a form of aestheticism.

Much of what Goring preaches to Lady Chiltern is based on ideas that were to be explored in socialism in which he had created the Christ figure as being an artist, an outsider, as a dandy, somebody who rejected property. A property-based materialistic society. Goring preaches the doctrine of love as preached by Christ in the gospel. Robert Chiltern is more of pragmatic. Goring is willing to forgive that. He is not a very conventional dandy and can be aligned as a religious philosopher as illustrated in a comment by Anne Varty on the play, "An Ideal Husband and 'The Dandy' video (Royal Holloway University of London).

Oscar Wilde reverses stereotypes. According to Werner G. Jeanrond, Wilde introduces sentimental values beneath the aesthetic surface and creates a counter-current of a realistic dandy to a "man of wisdom who inverses idealism into emotional forgiveness. Mechanical idealism and pragmatic reason are compromised for humanistic affection to save a marriage based on true love articulated Jeanrond in his article "Revelation and Hermeneutics of Love".

Comic emphasis is made for the characters' articulation of "humanization, emotional depth added to clinical intellect" as a counterpoise to Lady Chiltern's transformation. Her new understanding and forgiving nature add to her culture, her physical warmth" (Innes, 32). She reappears in a new form where romantic values are affirmed and reveals the artificiality of class distinction and false idealism, (Jeanrond).

The stupefying preservation of appearances is repressed and pretensions are defeated and aborted for originality of character and human emotions. There is a persistent contrast between social appearances and personal integrity. The gulf that separates classes is not materialistic as much as humanistic. Honour and integrity are not related to social class. The real transformation made is internally accompanied by self-realization of the superiority of love, spiritual being and tender relations (Jeanrond).

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Jeanrond explains this view further, stating:

> . . . all human love is embodied; it expresses a desire to be in close relationship with other persons/subjects, it participates in a long history of human efforts to come to terms with otherness; it is always socially and linguistically embedded; it is gendered; it is intimately linked to human efforts to understand the process of becoming a self; it ultimately transcends mere attitude and emotion by entering into larger networks of relationality. Love refers, then, to complex and dynamic human developments which all in one way or another concern human encounters and relations with otherness.

Self-recognition is defined by love and explored through love. Through the process of selfrecognition and self-exploration, a subjective mental and spiritual process, the lover, in turn, the lover is grabbed into the exploration of his/her other (partner), hence their true love is sensed and attained. As this process is completed and the state of subjectivity evolves into objectivity, both accept one another. Jeanrond expresses his viewpoint saying that, "The centre of love is the recognition of relational subjectivity and its potential for enabling experiences of transcendence and revelation. Every communal concern for adequate interpretation of texts, traditions, and selfunderstandings must struggle with the recognition of the respective other (cf., Saarinen 2016). Such recognition is the business of love. . ."

Love signifies a sort of unity with the other without minimization, neglection, or negation of their differences. Love is to accept the other as other and to build a constructive relationship given such differences. By this, love is nurtured and grows on the fertile ground of acceptance.

The seven heavenly virtues, also known as remedial values, are; humility, charity, chastity, gratitude, temperance, patience, and diligence. They are the opposite of the seven deadly sins: sins, pride, greed, wrath, envy, lust, gluttony, and sloth. Both are cited in the play in juxtaposition. The *Old Testament Book of Wisdom* states that wisdom "teaches moderation and prudence, righteousness and fortitude, and nothing in life is more useful than these" (Bible Gateway, https://www.biblegateway.com/verse/en/Wisdom%208%3A7.).

Roman writers such as Horace extolled virtues, and they listed and warned against vices. Horace's first epistles states that "to flee vice is the beginning of virtue and to have got rid of folly is the beginning of wisdom" (Epistles I.I).

Lord Goring teaches Lady Chiltern a lesson while he inherently refers to the seven virtues and the seven sins combined. He utterly echoes the scourging of Christ before his crucifixion as he refers to women who install themselves as judges and arbiters to their husbands:

> What sort of existence will he have if you rob him of the fruits of his ambition, if you take him from the splendor of a great political career, if you close the doors of public life against him, if you condemn him to sterile failure, he who was made for triumph and success? Women are not meant to judge us, but to forgive us when we need forgiveness. Pardon, not punishment is their mission. Why should you scourge him with rods for a sin done in his youth, before he knew you, before he knew himself? (*An Ideal Husband*, 117)

Sir Robert Chiltern is a pattern husband (ideal); he believes in Higher Education for women, dines with his wife at home, and is neither dull nor usually violent as the general rule. His main preoccupation is not to be exposed and placed in the pillory and hounded from public life. Appearances overwhelm his thinking more than his conscience does. Belittling the act in defense of his fame and position, and finding justifications for his misconduct overshadow the feeling of shame felt then by Oscar Wilde, for he was soon expected to face the scandal of his trial and conviction for homosexual practices.

But he is an ideal husband because he opposes the dominant pattern of men in this age who never appreciate their women. "Our husbands never appreciate anything in us" (*An Ideal Husband,* 19). However, for Lord Goring, "it was husbands who were punished" (20) because it is a corrupt society plagued by a modern mania for morality and incorruptibility. He holds that human relations are complicated like wheels within wheels; they imply invisible intricate motives, inner and outer influences as well as social circumstances.

During that age, politics was a combination of "a noble career", "a clever game", and "a great nuisance". Sir Robert "bought success at a great price" (*An Ideal Husband,* 43) which requires audacity and dead conscience rather being regarded as weakness. His wife is over-self-confident and intolerant. As Sir Robert put it, it is her fault, she has made an idol of him. Women do place their husbands on monstrous pedestals, cannot accept their imperfections, nor can they forgive their faults, weaknesses, and follies. So what is love, if the hands of the beloved should not come to cure the wounds of their lovers. On the contrary, when men fall in love, they love women, knowing all their defects and imperfections because it is the imperfect, not the perfect, who is in need of love. "A man's love is like that. It is wider, larger, more human than a woman's". But women make false idols of their husbands. She, who believes he cannot touch her because he would soil her forever, is the very reason for his ruin, not his savior as she claims impeccability. "Let women make no ideals of men! Let them not put them on altars and bow before them, or they may ruin other lives as completely as you – you whom I have so wildly loved have ruined mine" (*An Ideal Husband,* 71).

He holds genuine love for her because his image in her eyes matters so much to him. He fears to lose her, on the one hand. Her love for him is a "painted mask", though she accuses him of this mask, it falls as

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soon as the image of this idol is stained in her eyes, on the other hand.

The moment Sir Robert closes the door by the end of Act II reminds us of Nora slamming the door in *A Doll's House.* The play is a parody of Ibsen's play. Both, Robert and Nora, are sick of appearances. Both have sacrificed for the appeasement of their surroundings and their partners. Both have exerted their utmost and gave their all for the comfort and satisfaction of their partners. In *A Doll's House* the door slamming is the end, but in Wildean *An Ideal husband,* it occurs in Act II to later give room for forgiveness and reconciliation forging a happy ending of the play and teaching people how to forgive, accept, and coexist.

As the mason put out the light and darkness covers the place, the only light there comes from the chandelier that hangs over the staircase illuminating the tapestry of the Triumph of Love. Their love will triumph at the end. It has a double ironical effect, Sir Robert Chiltern is saved from disgrace and is about to lose his political career and his new tolerant loving wife has persuaded him to maintain and to accept the cabinet position. These are the complicated circumstances and relations, wheels within wheels, triumphs and sacrifices. To gain one, you have to concede the other, hence objectivity is realized.

Ironically, positions are reversed, and a few hours later, Lady Chiltern faces the same position. She too cannot face her husband with truth, though she is guiltless. For both, the fate of their relationship is associated with a letter, even though different. Mrs. Cheveley "untruthful, dishonest, an evil influence on everyone whose trust or friendship she could win. . . . She stole things, she was a thief, she was sent away for being a thief" (*An Ideal Husband,* 35), her part "is merely a slightly decolte one" but "She has survived all her creditors" (50) as Lord Goring exemplary modifies. She acts as a dominant threat to both. She controls their reciprocal relationship from both sides, puts poison in their hearts, kills their love, throws bitterness in their lives, and breaks the idol image held by each to other. She blackmails Sir Robert Chiltern to secure her financial investments while destroying his marital life and reducing it to mercenary transactions. In her youth, she devices an engagement with Lord Goring to swindle him. And now, she presses him to exchange Sir Robert's letter for marrying her. Despite her vile and malicious intentions, she is a Wildean tool for teaching forgiveness, acceptance, reconciliation, and reunification. All her attempts are thwarted and reversed to their interest. Now, being exposed before one another, they are able to live in harmony and unite in one, which is subjectivity.

The Ephesians 5:22-25 reads "Wives, submit to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband in the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the Church, his body, and is himself its savior. Now as the Church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her". This concept is also emphasized in *An Ideal Husband* in the words of Lady Chiltern towards the end of the play "A man's life is of more value than a woman's. It has larger issues, wider scope, greater ambitions. Our lives revolve in curves of emotions. It is upon lines of intellect that a man's life progresses. . . And I will not spoil your life for you, nor see you spoil it as a sacrifice to me, a useless sacrifice" (118). "It is love, Robert. Love, and only Love" (123).

Vices and inequalities are buried under superficial piety, meanwhile blackmailing is concealed under the veil of a Utopian woman who comes to strip off entire community members, and nonetheless, corruptness, immorality, and villainy are all combined in her ever-wrong-doing self, even transgressing the seven deadly sins.

As husband and wife are united by marriage, they become two in one whole. So mutual understanding inevitably leads them to establish a communication process disclosing their inner thoughts and emotions. Hence, the constituent parts are united in one whole, similar to the Christian trinity. Here, love becomes subjective in their praxis for truth. Finally, through love, they reach truth as manifested in divine revelation and realize that truth is God's love. A self-critical understanding of human experience spawns a tolerant self-cloaked with the seven virtues. This is the interpretation inferred from this play. Wilde intentionally breaks and challenges the portrayal of rigid moral ideals of his time. Lady Chiltern, in the end of Act II, depicts herself as a martyred wife to her husband's sin; a stereotype image of the age. But Wilde saps this image with Lady Chiltern's development of character and her realization of her husband's unconditioned love to her and of her flaw as an unforgiving wife.

It is evident that Wilde has triumphed for masculinity by proving Sir Robert Chiltern to be *An Ideal Husband* and Lord Goring as the wise dandy who is very deep. Superficiality or appearances imply layers of depth underneath. Wilde departs from the stereotypical image of perfection, virtue, and chastity as feminine and has shown men as more understanding and compassionate than women. In this play, he demonstrates that balance in life is stricken by a pearl of male wisdom.

In her book, *Gender Trouble,* Judith Butler demonstrates that "The book, hence, is a lot congenial to the experience of those who have understood 'what it is to live in the social world as what is impossible', illegible; unrealizable, unreal, and illegitimate'" (1999: VIII) (Zayani & Pourgiv, 34).

Zayani & Pourgiv quoted Murrenus' opinion of Wilde, "'[r]arely have we 'read' such outre and flamboyant style, whether in fashion or in letters, as that

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of the irrepressible Oscar Wilde, as subversion, rebellion against 'normalcy', and as an indictment against intolerance'" (33). For Wilde, Art is a supreme end in itself.

Under every single irony, paradox, epigram, and expression lies other shades of interpretations related to several personal and societal illnesses of that age. Wilde wrote this play hoping to be pardoned, it is but an interlude for the big event of his trial, so people would have learnt to forgive. He wrote it as an apology for himself. The results are public honour and triumph of love, affectation, empathy, and compassion, and a defeat of superficial appearances. Triumph of genuity and loss of falsehood.

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