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Twilight of the Idylls: Wilde, Tennyson, and *Fin-de-Siècle* Anti-Idealism

By Elizabeth Carolyn Miller

Nowadays, with our modern mania for morality, every one has to pose as a paragon of purity, incorruptibility, and all the other seven deadly virtues – and what is the result? You all go over like ninepins – one after the other.

-- Mrs. Cheveley in Oscar Wilde's *An Ideal Husband* (1895)

Morality is merely an interpretation of certain phenomena, more precisely a *mis*interpretation.

– Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* (1889; pub. in English 1896)

IN THE CLIMACTIC FINALE to the first act of Oscar Wilde's 1895 play *An Ideal Husband*, Gertrude Chiltern convinces her husband, a Member of Parliament, not to support the construction of a boondoggle Argentinean canal. Gertrude, not her husband, is the ostensibly moral character here, since the canal's only purpose is to create wealth for its stockholders, but the language she uses in this impassioned speech quotes Guinevere, the contrite fallen wife of Alfred Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*. Near the end of the *Idylls*, recognizing that her infidelity has occasioned war, turmoil, and the end of Arthur's reign, Guinevere laments:

Ah my God,

What might I not have made of thy fair world,

Had I but loved thy highest creature here?

It was my duty to have loved the highest:

It surely was my profit had I known:

It would have been my pleasure had I seen.

We needs must love the highest when we see it (G 649-56)¹

Repeating these words and ideas under drastically different circumstances, Lady Chiltern tells her husband in the finale to Wilde's first act: "I don't think you realise sufficiently, Robert, that you have brought into the political life of our time a nobler atmosphere, a finer attitude towards

life, a freer air of purer aims and higher ideals – I know it, and for that I love you, Robert. . . . I will love you always, because you will always be worthy of love. We needs must love the highest when we see it!” (*Ideal* 69).

An Ideal Husband clearly seeks to call Gertrude Chiltern’s ideal of love into question, but this passage demonstrates that it also seeks to call Tennyson’s love of ideals into question. In a play that puns incessantly on the homophones (or near-homophones) “ideal,” “idol,” and “idle,” Wilde achieves a kind of indirect paronomasia with respect to the term “idyll.”² For alongside Gertrude’s uncited quotation of *Idylls of the King* – “We needs must love the highest when we see it!” – the play includes many less obvious echoes of Tennyson’s epic poem. Such echoes position the play as an attack on Victorian moral idealism, represented by Tennyson’s work. This article will consider Wilde, along with writers like Henrik Ibsen, Friedrich Nietzsche, and George Bernard Shaw, as part of a late-nineteenth-century reaction against moral and aesthetic idealism, and suggest that we can see this reaction at work in *An Ideal Husband*’s rendering of *Idylls of the King*. At stake in the ironic title of Wilde’s play is a *fin-de-siècle* skewering of Victorian “idealism,” a skewering that drew on various conceptions of the “ideal,” but ultimately was an attack on Victorian moral codes, especially as they pertained to gender and sexuality.

“Idealism” is a slippery term that has functioned in different ways in different contexts at different historical moments, but in the course of the nineteenth century, as Naomi Schor has described, the category of “idealism” emerged within critical discourse in contradistinction to “realism,” though this usage is now largely forgotten (11). Victorian literary critics, Sharon Marcus has established, used the term “idealism” to describe literature that “communicate[d] a moral vision shaped by accepted religious and social values” (267). Such literature was “committed to representations based on social norms endowed with the status of transcendental

moral values” (270), in contrast to the “realism” of a writer like Émile Zola, whose perspective was ostensibly amoral. The emergence of this usage of “idealism” in critical discourse was related to, but not coterminous with, the rise of philosophical idealism in intellectual circles during these same years.³ The two developments are connected in that both are part of a broader reaction against utilitarianism and scientific materialism, but their usages of “idealism” were nonetheless distinct. As Marcus has established through extensive analysis of literary reviews in Victorian periodicals, “In a philosophical context, *ideal* meant conceptual or imaginary, confined to the realm of thought. In Victorian literary criticism, however, *idealism* referred to the belief that *literary representations should be governed not by mimesis and fidelity to reality but by values, by adherence to ideas of the good*” (268).

By the end of the century, Toril Moi has argued in her recent study of Ibsen, this usage of “idealism” took on a more specific nuance and became “the slogan of the anti-naturalist, anti-modernist, moralizing lovers of uplifting beauty” (96), and the idealist literary tradition made an “inglorious decline into a conservative moralism” (3). Moi argues that the period from roughly 1870 to 1914 saw a “movement away from idealism,” with modernism eventually emerging from this “negation of idealism” (67). Not all writers of the day agreed that the idealist tendency could be easily cast aside, but John Addington Symonds, in an 1887 essay titled “Realism and Idealism” in the *Fortnightly Review*, argued that a “spurious idealism” in ascendant during the nineteenth century had resulted in “a revolt against the false principles of that phthisical Idealism which claimed the Empire in despite of nature” (125). Tennyson, for Wilde and his anti-idealist contemporaries, became a primary example of this school.

In George Bernard Shaw’s 1891 study *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, the first book on Ibsen that was published in English, we find an open attack on idealist literature. Shaw describes

“ideals” as the masks of conventional morality in which most of us invest a kind of fetishistic power and which the majority of us are not brave enough to remove. Take, for example, the “ideal” of the family, as Shaw describes it:

The family as a beautiful and holy natural institution is only a fancy picture of what every family would have to be if everybody was to be suited, invented by the minority as a mask for the reality, which in its nakedness is intolerable to them. We call this sort of fancy picture an IDEAL; and the policy of forcing individuals to act on the assumption that all ideals are real, and to recognize and accept such action as standard moral conduct, absolutely valid under all circumstances, contrary conduct or any advocacy of it being discountenanced and punished as immoral, may therefore be described as the policy of IDEALISM.

(219-20)

Shaw lodges an attack against idealist writers, foremost among whom is Alfred Tennyson. Shaw says that Tennyson never “wrote a line in which some highly respectable ideal was not implicit” (221) – not a surprising judgment given that Tennyson’s epic poem had been received in such terms: a March 1882 piece on the “Guinevere” idyll, for example, claims, “It is the province of poetry to furnish us high ideals for imitation. Idealism seems to be a want of our nature” (“Guinevere” 344), and an 1871 article on the *Idylls* in the *Spectator* calls Tennyson a “great moral idealist” (“Idealism” 1459). In contrast to Tennyson’s poetry, Shaw presents Ibsen’s plays as nothing less than an assault on conventional morality and the idealist literary tradition that upholds it. Once Ibsen’s eyes were opened to the “mischief of idealism,” Shaw says in *The Quintessence*, his “skill as a playwright and his genius as an artist were thenceforth used only to secure attention and effectiveness for his detailed attack on idealism” (243)

Wilde was a big fan of *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*. He wrote to Shaw in February 1893: “your little book on Ibsenism and Ibsen is such a delight to me that I constantly take it up, and always find it stimulating and refreshing: England is the land of intellectual fogs but you have done much to clear the air” (*Complete Letters* 554). A few months later, in the course of the same exchange, Wilde wrote to Shaw that he was “rather itching to be at” his next play, which would be *An Ideal Husband* (564). Wilde plays are in many ways very different from Ibsen’s, but this correspondence provides a context in which we can see Wilde responding to the species of idealism described in Shaw’s *Quintessence* – a species particularly represented by Tennyson – during the time he was conceiving *An Ideal Husband*. In the same year that Shaw published *The Quintessence*, Wilde’s essay “The Critic as Artist” asked, “For what is Truth? In matters of religion, it is simply the opinion that has survived. . . . In matters of art, it is one’s last mood” (194), advocating the same sort of perspectivism that Shaw admired in Ibsen. Wilde was clearly not a naturalist, a term often used pejoratively in England to associate realist writers with the scandalous French school of Émile Zola, nor was he a realist on the order of Ibsen; yet he aligned himself with the anti-idealist school, a school defined more by its take on conventional morality than its take on realism. Such an alignment is evident in Shaw’s 12 January 1895 review of *An Ideal Husband* for the *Saturday Review*: “The modern note is struck in Sir Robert Chiltern’s assertion of the individuality and courage of his wrongdoing as against the mechanical idealism of his stupidly good wife” (“Two New Plays” 7).

Wilde, like Shaw and Ibsen, is thus a founding father in a certain genealogy of literary modernism in which modernism emerges from, as Moi puts it, the “negation of idealism” (67); this is a genealogy that turns – like most genealogies of modernism – on the rejection of Victorian values. Tennyson, as Carol T. Christ has shown, was practically synonymous with the

“Victorian” at the time Wilde was writing: “The word ‘Victorian’ first seems to have been used to describe a literary period by the poet and critic Edmund Clarence Stedman, who published *Victorian Poets* in 1876. In his book Stedman argues that the Victorian period ... dominated by the influence of Tennyson and his idyllic method, was drawing to a close” (156).⁴ A close analysis of Wilde’s rejection of Tennyson in *An Ideal Husband*, however, suggests that this proto-modernist, anti-idealist play selectively employs evidence from the Victorian past it rejects. Wilde puts forth a caricatured version of Tennyson’s idealism against which his play can define a new modern sensibility. Tennyson’s poem, one might argue, already undermines the moral idealism it appears to uphold, but not so in Wilde’s allusive version. While Wilde’s play does successfully critique the ideals of gender and sexuality at the heart of Tennyson’s moral vision, at the same time, Wilde proves himself unwilling to completely relinquish these same ideals. This article will explore how Wilde uses Tennyson to dismantle Victorian moral idealism in *An Ideal Husband*, but also how idealism self-destructs in Tennyson’s poem, complicating the version of literary history upon which the anti-idealism of Wilde and other *fin-de-siècle* writers is ostensibly founded. The final section of the essay will turn to the broader context of *fin-de-siècle* anti-idealism, positioning Wilde’s rendering of Tennyson within a contemporaneous anti-idealist discourse represented not only by Shaw and Ibsen, but also by Friedrich Nietzsche.

* * *

THERE IS NO QUESTION that Oscar Wilde knew his Tennyson. His letters reference *In Memoriam* and quote from “To Virgil,” “Frater Ave atque Vale,” and “Lucretius” (*Complete Letters* 26, 721, 972, 983). In a late letter to Robert Ross, Wilde describes himself as “‘waving hands’ like Tennyson’s Vivien” – an allusion to Vivien’s spell-casting over Merlin in *Idylls of the King* (1177). Evidently Wilde had Tennyson’s words at his fingers’ ends, but his use of

Tennyson in *An Ideal Husband* suggests that his relationship to the poet was far from reverent. One might think that Wilde's comic play could have little in common with Tennyson's long epic poem, which was finally published in its entirety ten years before Wilde's play; and yet, in addition to the direct reference to Guinevere's speech quoted above, *An Ideal Husband* is structurally modeled on the *Idylls*. Wilde's play turns on the potential scandal of an adulterous love triangle among Robert Chiltern, Gertrude Chiltern, and Arthur Goring; the affair doesn't, in fact, exist, but appears to exist based on a letter held by the play's blackmailing villainess, Mrs. Cheveley. This mirrors Tennyson's *Idylls*, which turns on the love triangle of Arthur, Guinevere, and Lancelot, and which emphasizes the damage of gossip and scandal spread by the villainess Vivien.⁵

In Wilde's triangle, the husband, Sir Robert Chiltern, is the erring Lancelot whose past is marked by sin – his fortune was built, we learn, on a key episode of insider trading and illegal sharing of state secrets early in his career – and the triangle's other man, Lord Arthur Goring, emerges as the play's hero. Goring pronounces the line that could be said to serve as the moral of the play, and it is a moral quite distinct from Tennyson's poem: "It is love, and not German philosophy, that is the true explanation of this world" (101). The reference to German idealist philosophy helps position the play in the anti-idealist school, as represented by contemporaries such as Shaw. Note that Wilde uses the first name "Arthur" for his dandy hero, a choice that can only be read as ironic given that Arthur Goring is characterized as "idle" rather than "ideal." Goring, called "the idlest man in London" (21), is distinguished by his moral perspectivism: after stage directions describe him as "stand[ing] in immediate relation to modern life," Goring declares: "Fashion is what one wears oneself. What is unfashionable is what other people wear. . . Just as vulgarity is simply the conduct of other people. . . . And falsehoods the truths of other

people” (137-38). Here, Wilde associates modern thought with a decline of definite standards and knowable truths – a decline of moral ideals – and he makes his hero, Arthur, the spokesman for that position. At the same time, he humorously substitutes the ideal Arthur of Tennyson’s epic with the idle Arthur of his own play.

Tennyson’s *Idylls* are a paean to an ideal version of English masculinity that Wilde seeks to undermine with a character like Lord Goring. As Clinton Machann argues, with the *Idylls* “Tennyson was engaged in the search for an ideal code of masculinity that would serve to suppress the natural depravity associated with maleness through a rigorous program of social discipline and self-discipline” (203). In his well-known essay “The Female King: Tennyson’s Arthurian Apocalypse,” Elliot Gilbert asks “by what remarkable transformative process the traditionally virile and manly King Arthur of legend and romance evolved, during the nineteenth century, into the restrained, almost maidenly Victorian monarch of Alfred Lord Tennyson’s most ambitious work[?]” (163). But Gilbert ignores how conceptions of masculinity were changing in this period such that restraint itself became manly and not maidenly. James Eli Adams has described how repression and rigid self-discipline became key to Victorian notions of masculinity, arguing that by the 1830s, “self-discipline is increasingly claimed as the special province and distinguishing attribute of middle-class men” (7). In this emerging model, which Adams traces to early-Victorian economic shifts, “the capacity for self-discipline” comes to be understood as “a distinctly masculine attribute,” and “Victorian ‘manliness’ often figures as one more mechanism for enforcing continence” (2). The *Idylls* honor this Victorian ideal of manly repression and self-command from the opening dedication to the recently deceased Prince Albert, remembered for his self-restraint: “With what sublime repression of himself, / And in what limits” (*Idylls*, D 18-19). Rigorously controlled masculinity is the Arthurian ideal

throughout the poem. As Machann notes, “Arthur’s ‘perfection’ is most evident in his ability to control his own considerable capacity for violence” (210). And it is not only in the sphere of violence that Arthur exercises restraint: Lancelot’s great sin is sexual incontinence, whereas Arthur tells Guinevere, “I was ever virgin save for thee” (G 554).⁶

Wilde’s Arthur Goring rejects such manly restraint. Far from the “sublime repression” celebrated by Tennyson, Wilde’s Arthur is a man of sensuous indulgence who departs from Victorian models of masculinity in his active pursuit of pleasure and self-gratification. When his father, Lord Caversham, observes, “You seem to me to be living entirely for pleasure,” Goring responds, “What else is there to live for, father?” (27). Wilde’s pleasure-seeking Arthur can be read as a corrective to the austere Arthur of Tennyson’s epic, a counter to the constrained masculine ideal of Victorian morality.

Wilde also alludes to the *Idylls* with his play’s villainess, Laura Cheveley, a red-headed vixen whose lamian characterization follows Tennyson’s Vivien. Tennyson was certainly not the first writer to represent an evil woman with snake imagery, but practically every descriptor of Vivien relies on this comparison. Wilde, as noted above, quoted from “Merlin and Vivien” in one of his letters, so was obviously familiar with the depiction. Tennyson constantly positions Vivien at other characters’ feet, such as when she “Cast herself down, knelt to the Queen, and wail’d” (MV 65). In the scene where she seduces Merlin, Vivien lies down at his feet and clings “like a snake”:

And lissome Vivien, holding by his heel,
Writhed toward him, slid up his knee and sat,
Behind his ankle twined her hollow feet
Together, curved an arm about his neck,

Clung like a snake (MV 236-40)

Wilde's Mrs. Cheveley is a dangerous scandalmonger, like Vivien, and similarly serpentine: "Lamia-like, she is in green and silver" (150), with "Venetian red hair" (13). She wears – and loses – a brooch in the shape of a snake with a large ruby on its head. It is by means of this brooch that Goring is able to trap Mrs. Cheveley and prevent her from blackmailing Robert Chiltern. The ruby-headed brooch encapsulates her persona in the play – a red-headed snake.⁷

If Lord Goring is the Arthur of Wilde's play, and Mrs. Cheveley the Vivien, Gertrude is the Guinevere. Certainly the structure of *An Ideal Husband* invites us to think of Gertrude as a Guinevere figure who has betrayed her husband not by having an affair with his best friend (though she is suspected of it by Mrs. Cheveley) but by holding him to an unrealistic standard. The play is titled *An Ideal Husband*, but various characters reject Gertrude's treasured desire for the perfect moral actor that she expects her husband to be. In the first act, Mrs. Marchmont says to Lady Basildon, in a typically Wildean humorous inversion: "My poor Olivia! We have married perfect husbands, and we are well punished for it" (30). Likewise, at the end of the play, Lord Caversham says to his newly engaged son, Lord Goring, "if you don't make this young lady an ideal husband, I'll cut you off with a shilling." Mabel Chiltern, Robert's sister who is now betrothed to Goring, replies, "An ideal husband! Oh, I don't think I should like that. It sounds like something in the next world" (238). Mabel wants not an "ideal" husband, nor an "idol" husband like Chiltern (who accuses his wife of making a "false idol of me" [132]), but an "idle" husband like Lord Goring.

Gertrude Chiltern is the character most noted for her moral idealism, and she is ridiculed for it throughout the play. Lady Markby jokes early in the first act, "Lady Chiltern is a woman of the very highest principles ... [and] has a very ennobling effect on life, though her dinner-parties

are rather dull sometimes” (51). In a play that glorifies a witty, dandyish hero like Goring, throwing a dull dinner party is no minor sin. Later, Goring is shocked when Robert Chiltern describes his wife’s rigid standards: “Is Lady Chiltern as perfect as all that?” “Yes, my wife is as perfect as all that.” “What a pity!” (74). The play’s contempt of Gertrude’s moral rigidity is evident, too, in that she is childless, not by choice, just like Guinevere in the *Idylls*. For Tennyson, Guinevere’s barrenness is a punishment for her sexual transgressions; Gertrude is ostensibly punished for an overly strict morality rather than a lax one.

Gertrude expects her husband to have an ennobling effect on English politics – to initiate something akin to the “nobler time” of Arthur’s reign (*Idylls*, CA 456). At the end of the first act, imploring her husband not to back Mrs. Cheveley on the Argentine Canal, Gertrude cries:

To the world, as to myself, you have been an ideal always. Oh! be that ideal still.
That great inheritance throw not away – that tower of ivory do not destroy.
Robert, men can love what is beneath them – things unworthy, stained,
dishonoured. We women worship when we love; and when we lose our worship,
we lose everything. Oh! don’t kill my love for you, don’t kill that! (65)

She later tells Goring that if her husband had supported the scheme, “it would have been the first stain on a career that has been stainless always. Robert must be above reproach” (98). The lines are curious, in part, because they apply to a man a standard and vocabulary of moral purity more commonly ascribed to Victorian women. In insisting that Robert be “stainless,” Gertrude could be said to undermine double standards in Victorian sexual morality by turning the tables and demanding absolute purity of her husband. The gender reversal becomes even clearer when Chiltern accuses his wife of putting him on a “pedestal” – that is, making him into an object of worshipful gaze, a position typically occupied by the “angel in the house”: “Why can’t you

women love us, faults and all? Why do you place us on monstrous pedestals? . . . Women think that they are making ideals of men. What they are making of us are false idols merely” (131-32).

Critics such as Richard Dellamora and Kerry Powell have read such lines as commentary on the late-Victorian social purity movement, a movement that had close ties with Victorian feminism and sought to curb sexual immorality, especially among men. The social purity movement was a target of *fin-de-siècle* anti-idealist rhetoric, as is quite evident in Shaw’s attack on William T. Stead in the third chapter of *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*. Here, Shaw describes Stead, a leader in the social purity movement, as having “entered on a campaign with the object of establishing the ideal of sexual ‘purity’ as a condition of public life” – a description which could equally apply to Wilde’s Gertrude Chiltern. Shaw goes on to say that “Prominent among [Stead’s] ideals is an ideal of womanliness. In support of that ideal he will, like all idealists, make and believe any statement, however obviously and grotesquely unreal” (224).

The wave of purity activism with which Stead was associated was, as Dellamora notes, indirectly responsible for Wilde’s imprisonment in 1895, just a few months after the debut of *An Ideal Husband*: “the fight against the double standard of male sexual morality had led to passage of the Labouchère Amendment.” Under this legislation, “the objective of securing legal protection of young females from sexual exploitation had been secured at the expense of criminalizing another class of persons” – homosexual men. The Labouchère Amendment was attached to the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, passed in response to Stead’s muckracking “Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon” series, which focused on the prostitution of young girls in London. Thus “in the midst of the West End run of *An Ideal Husband*, Wilde would be arrested under the terms of the Act on charges of ‘gross indecency’” (120). Lady Chiltern, we learn in *An Ideal Husband*, is actively involved in the Women’s Liberal

Association, a detail that positions her squarely in the sphere of female political agitation associated with the social purity movement. As Powell describes, the women's groups particularly associated with the campaign were the National Vigilance Association, the Social Purity Alliance, and the Women's Liberal Association (131).

The social purity movement highlighted longstanding tensions within feminism between those who advocated women's sexual independence and those who sought to restrict men to the same standards of propriety as women (Dellamora 123). In 1893, just a few years before the first appearance of Wilde's play, Sarah Grand published *The Heavenly Twins*, perhaps the most important work to emerge from this fraught moment in feminism. It generated huge public debate and went through six editions in its first year of publication. Grand's novel focuses on a young woman who learns about her new husband's sexually immoral past and refuses to consummate the marriage; the novel's heroine expects sexual purity from her husband, and her expectation is represented as just. Shaw, a critic of the social purity movement, considered the novel's position "a *reductio ad absurdum* of our whole moral system," since it counteracts the double standard by applying an outmoded "feminine morality" to men ("Second" 101). Wilde's play makes much the same point, presenting Lady Chiltern's standards of stainlessness for her husband as priggish. The play, as many critics have noted, is a reversal of the "woman with a past" drama, focusing sympathetically on a man with a past.

Fearing that his wife will leave him if she discovers his past "stain," Chiltern shies from telling his wife what Laura Cheveley has on him – proof of his stock market swindling. When Lady Chiltern ultimately finds out what Robert has done, she exclaims:

Don't come near me. Don't touch me. I feel as if you had soiled me for ever. Oh!
what a mask you have been wearing all these years! A horrible painted mask! . . .

And how I worshipped you! You were to me something apart from common life,
a thing pure, noble, honest, without stain. . . . And now – oh, when I think that I
made of a man like you my ideal! the ideal of my life! (130-31)

Her vocabulary of “stain[ed],” “painted,” and “soiled” indicates that Lady Chiltern’s morality has its basis in a notion of absolute sexual purity which, once sullied, can never be recuperated. This is the language of the fallen woman, used here to describe a fallen man. Such a morality pits materiality (dirt, color) against an ethereal, colorless ideal (“pure . . . without stain”), and Tennyson’s *Idylls*, as we shall see, relies heavily on this very configuration of moral idealism that is undermined in Wilde’s play.

* * *

INDEED, IF THE SOCIAL PURITY MOVEMENT sought to hold men to stricter standards of sexual morality, Tennyson’s epic is a reminder that manly purity was not invented by one strain of late-Victorian feminism. Arthur is called the “stainless man” and the “stainless gentleman,” and he binds his knights to vows of chivalry that aim at pure moral perfection (MV 777, 790). Early in the *Idylls*, Gareth, a youth who seeks to join Arthur’s round table, dreams that as a knight he will

fly discaged to sweep
In ever-highering eagle-circles up
To the great Sun of Glory, and thence swoop
Down upon all things base, and dash them dead,
A knight of Arthur, working out his will,
To cleanse the world. (GL 20-25)

The spatial configuration here – with the sky and the sun representing the pure and the good, while the low and the “base” are near the ground – is premised on a metaphysical division between the transcendent ideal and base materiality. Gareth’s desire to “cleanse” the world resonates with Gertrude’s fixation on her husband’s “stain.”

In the climactic scene of Tennyson’s epic, when Arthur confronts Guinevere about her unfaithfulness, he uses language much like Gertrude Chiltern’s attack on her husband:

I cannot take thy hand; that too is flesh,
And in the flesh thou hast sinn’d; and mine own flesh
Here looking down on thine polluted, cries
‘I loathe thee’ (G 550-53)

Like Gertrude, Arthur positions himself as a figure of purity in danger of being sullied by the dirtiness of an erring partner. Guinevere, in reflection after the king’s denunciation, comes to think of herself in these terms: “The shadow of another cleaves to me, / And makes me one pollution” (G 613-14). For most of the poem, however, it was Arthur’s very highness – his approach to a transcendent ideal – that kept Guinevere from loving him. As she explains to Lancelot near the middle of the poem:

‘Arthur, my lord, Arthur, the faultless King,
That passionate perfection, my good lord –
But who can gaze upon the Sun in heaven?
...
Rapt in this fancy of his Table Round,
And swearing men to vows impossible,
To make them like himself: but, friend, to me

He is all fault who hath no fault at all:

For who loves me must have a touch of earth;

The low sun makes the colour: I am yours,

Not Arthur's, as ye know, save by the bond. (LE 121-23, 129-35)

Guinevere associates Arthur with the sun (the transcendent ideal) and Lancelot with the earth (the base material); her preference for Lancelot works against the idealist aesthetics of the poem and perhaps even dismantles them to some extent, for she sees beauty in the earthly and the poem is not unsympathetic to her position. In one passage, Guinevere recalls the moment when she first saw Arthur, to whom she was already betrothed, after being escorted from her father's house by Arthur's knight Lancelot. Guinevere and Lancelot became fond of one another in their journey, and she remembers when

first she saw the King

Ride toward her from the city, sigh'd to find

Her journey done, glanced at him, thought him cold,

High, self-contain'd, and passionless, not like him,

'Not like my Lancelot' (G 400-04)

For the young queen-to-be, leaving her father's house for the first time, brought to a strange place and an unknown husband, it is unsurprising that she would prefer the warmer, earthier Lancelot to the cold, high-minded Arthur, a counterpoint to the idealism that seems to undergird the poem.

Arthur himself, when he chose to marry Guinevere, understood her to be "of the beasts." From a native land overrun with wild animals, Guinevere would rise to a higher, more rarified plane with their marriage: "Shall I not lift her from this land of beasts / Up to my throne, and side

by side with me?” (CA 79-80). Yet, lifted to Arthur’s level, Guinevere continues to prefer the love of Lancelot. Tennyson allows her the opportunity to explain in a way that makes her choices understandable to the reader:

my false voluptuous pride, that took
Full easily all impressions from below,
Would not look up, or half-despised the height
To which I would not or I could not climb –
I thought I could not breathe in that fine air
That pure severity of perfect light –
I yearn’d for warmth and colour which I found
In Lancelot (G 636-44)

Living with Arthur is compared to life on top of a mountain: beautiful, but inhospitable to human needs. Guinevere finally concludes that Arthur is “the highest and most human too” (G 645), but Tennyson’s depiction of Arthur throughout the poem – a depiction that preserves a sense of reverent distance – actually supports the idea that he is not altogether human.

The incompatibility of the human and the ideal is, indeed, often suggested in the *Idylls*, as with the character most closely associated with ideal purity in the poem: Elaine, “the lily maid,” whose lily whiteness is set in opposition to the red rose that represents Guinevere. In one illustrative passage, Lancelot and Guinevere are walking through a garden, and Lancelot calls Guinevere’s attention to a group of “perfect-pure” lilies, so white that “As light a flush / As hardly tints the blossom of the quince / Would mar their charm of stainless maidenhood” (BB 261-63). Elaine, the lily maid whom these lilies obviously symbolize, is so pure that she cannot see Lancelot’s sin – just like Arthur, who is too pure to see Guinevere’s sin. Speaking of

Lancelot, Elaine tells her father: “it is my glory to have loved / One peerless, without stain” (LE 1083-84). Elaine is so pure that she has to die; she essentially wills her own death, planning her corpse’s post-death performance in a way that suggests inner morbidity. Her story supports an underlying idea in the poem that purity is not compatible with life.

Many characters in the *Idylls* also reflect on the vows sworn by Arthur’s knights, which demand a more rigorous code of chivalry than had ever been known, and were to have initiated the beginning of a “nobler time” (CA 456). The danger of their strictness is implied, however, throughout the poem, such as in “Balin and Balan,” the last of the idylls to be published. The knight Balin seeks to live according to Arthur’s code, and determines

To learn what Arthur meant by courtesy,
Manhood, and knighthood; wherefore hover’d round
Lancelot, but when he mark’d his high sweet smile
In passing, and a transitory word
Make knight or churl or child or damsel seem
From being smiled at happier in themselves –
Sigh’d, as a boy lame-born beneath a height,
That glooms his valley, sighs to see the peak
Sun-flush’d, or touch at night the northern star;
 ... so Balin marveling oft
How far beyond him Lancelot seem’d to move,
Groan’d, and at times would mutter, ‘These be gifts,
Born with the blood, not learnable, divine,
Beyond *my* reach.’ (BB 154-63, 169-72)

Balin's dismay is particularly ironic since it is Lancelot, cuckold of the king, whom he fears he cannot emulate. He imagines Lancelot as the pure mountaintop peak he cannot reach, although to the Queen, Lancelot is the valley to Arthur's mountain. While Balin perceives Lancelot's daunting perfection, readers know that this represents a false idealism. And the conventional spatial configuration of idealism in this passage – with “height,” “peak,” “sun,” and “star” representing Lancelot's perceived perfection – again suggests that Arthur's vows are literally beyond the reach of mortal man, as Arthur speculates shortly before his death: “O me! for why is all around us here / As if some lesser god had made the world[?]” (PA 13-14). Walter E. Houghton has described the Victorian period as an age of “ideal aspirations” but also an age “in which the old ideals were vanishing and new ones were many and half-formed. Aspiration could not easily find its objective correlative” (293). The idealism of Tennyson's poem can be read an ambivalent idealism that asserts the necessity of the moral ideal even as it exposes its own values as steadily eroding with the passage of time.

* * *

NO SUCH DILEMMA is posed in *An Ideal Husband*, a play in which moral ideals are inherently suspect. What seems to be an evil, from one point of view, might be a good from another. Robert Chiltern, a man much given to this way of thinking, is far less contrite for his offense than Lancelot, his counterpart in Tennyson's epic. Chiltern will do what he must to obtain his wife's forgiveness, but privately, speaking to Goring, he asks: “Do you really think, Arthur, that it is weakness that yields to temptation? I tell you that there are terrible temptations that it requires strength, strength and courage, to yield to. . . . There is a horrible, a terrible courage” (82-83). Chiltern's secret skepticism of the moral order he has violated makes him a far more subversive character than the contrite Lancelot. Chiltern is exactly the kind of character,

indeed, that Hall Caine warns against in his defense of idealist literature, “The New Watchwords of Fiction,” published in the *Contemporary Review* in 1890. Focusing on “a little circle of influential writers” who have claimed the end of literary idealism, Caine argues that “the moral effects of good literature” are at stake (479), and depicts the debate over idealism and realism as a kind of holy war between those who proclaim the death of God and those who don’t: “The Idealist must be a believer; a believer in God, a believer in man, and a believer in the divine justice whereon the world is founded” (488).

Chiltern seems to give the lie to divine justice. Indeed, he is a character for the age of Nietzsche and what Nietzsche called the “revaluation of all values” in *Twilight of the Idols* and elsewhere (3). *Twilight of the Idols* was one of the first works of Nietzsche to appear in English – in 1896, a year after the debut of *An Ideal Husband* – and there are important connections between it and Wilde’s play.⁸ Chiltern’s description of “yielding” to temptation – with “strength,” with “courage” – associates him with the Dionysian man glorified by Nietzsche, the man “who can dare to grant himself the whole range and richness of naturalness, who is strong enough for his freedom; ... the man to whom there is no longer anything forbidden except *weakness*, whether it be vice or virtue” (74). In the end, like so many stock-market criminals of our own day, Chiltern profits from his transgression and the play does not punish him for it. He emerges from Wilde’s drama with his marriage intact, his public face untarnished, his bank account undiminished, and he even gets a seat in the Cabinet.

As thinkers, Wilde and Nietzsche have much in common. Both were fond of aphorisms, and while Nietzsche wrote “‘All truth is simple.’ – Is that not a compound lie?” (5), Wilde wrote, “The truth is rarely pure and never simple” (*Importance* 18). Both writers pronounced against conventional morals and critiqued idealist philosophy, albeit in different ways. Nietzsche wrote

of Plato: “Ultimately my distrust of Plato runs deep ... he is so spoilt by morality, so proto-Christian – he already had the concept ‘good’ as his highest concept – that to describe the whole phenomenon of Plato I would use the harsh term ‘superior swindle’ or, if it sounds better, idealism” (77). Wilde, too, found reason to suspect Plato, but he managed to preserve Platonic idealism by substituting the term “art” for Plato’s “good.” In “The Critic as Artist,” for example, Wilde recommends that we read Plato’s metaphysics aesthetically:

[Plato] first perhaps stirred in the soul of man that desire that we have not yet satisfied, the desire to know the connection between Beauty and Truth, and the place of Beauty in the moral and intellectual order of the Kosmos. The problems of idealism and realism, as he sets them forth, may seem to many to be somewhat barren of result in the metaphysical sphere of abstract being in which he places them, but transfer them to the sphere of art, and you will find that they are still vital and full of meaning. It may be that it is as a critic of Beauty that Plato is destined to live, and that by altering the name of the sphere of his speculation we shall find a new philosophy. (120-21)

As this quotation suggests, in the aesthetic sphere, obvious distinctions emerge between Wilde and Nietzsche. In a section of *Twilight of the Idols* focused on “*L’art pour l’art*,” Nietzsche acknowledges that the “struggle against purpose in art is always a struggle against the *moralizing* tendency in art, against its subordination to morality” (55), but he objects to the idea that beauty can exist as an absolute ideal, and rejects the notion that art can remain autonomous from the world. In this sense, Nietzsche’s anti-idealism goes further than Wilde’s, for Wilde wants to preserve art and beauty as ideals – to create a religion of them – while Nietzsche argues: “Nothing is more qualified, let us say *more limited*, than our feeling for the beautiful. . . . Man

thinks the world is overwhelmed with beauty – he *forgets* he is its cause. He alone has bestowed beauty on it – oh! but a very human, all-too-human beauty” (52).

While we have no evidence that Wilde ever read Nietzsche (Thatcher 251), he was likely exposed to Nietzschean ideas in the air of the 1890s. The first works of Nietzsche did not appear in English in full until 1895 and 1896 – too late to have any influence on *An Ideal Husband* – but for years before this, English writers had been reading Nietzsche in German (and in some cases, French) and writing about him in the English press.⁹ Bits of Nietzsche had even been translated and published in English periodicals: John Davidson’s 1891 article “The New Sophist” in the London magazine *Speaker*, for example, employed “a number of aphorisms from *Human, All-Too-Human* which he had retranslated from a French rendering” (Thatcher 22). Nietzsche was also beginning to appear as a lecture topic in literary societies: in 1894, Alexander Tille “lectured on ‘Friedrich Nietzsche, the Herald of Modern Germany’ to the Glasgow Goethe Society” (23). Havelock Ellis, who was to become a key ambassador of Nietzschean thought in England, first came across Nietzsche in 1885 (95), and became familiar with his work by reading “the established French reviews, especially the *Revue des Deux Mondes*” (39), a journal with which Wilde was also acquainted.¹⁰

Whether Wilde was familiar with Nietzsche or not, the two authors were connected in the minds of many readers, especially on the continent. Nietzsche was better known on the continent than in England, and according to Stefano Evangelista, “the association with Nietzsche is a recurrent element of Wilde’s European reception.” For many European critics, the two authors’ “writings are harbingers of the forces threatening the disintegration of bourgeois art and culture that would erupt in the early twentieth century in the form of modernism” (14). In Russia, as Evgenii Bershtein notes, “the leading modernist St Petersburg journal *Severnyi vestnik* (Northern

herald) was the first periodical to stress the parallel.” In an 1895 review of Wilde’s 1891 volume *Intentions* (which included “The Critic as Artist”), the journal “outlined the connections between Wilde’s theories and Nietzsche’s philosophy” (290). Years later in England, Alfred Orage, editor of the modernist journal *New Age*, pronounced Wilde “our English Nietzsche” (Bristow 30).

Shaw was thought by many to have read and absorbed Nietzsche in writing his great attack on moral idealism, *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, which, as we have seen, was greatly admired by Wilde during the time he was conceiving *An Ideal Husband*. In an 1896 review of *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, the first volume of the collected Nietzsche works in English translated by Thomas Common, Shaw denies that Nietzsche directly influenced *The Quintessence*, but he depicts his work as companionable with the philosopher’s:

Famous as Nietzsche has become ... I never heard of him until a few years ago, when, on the occasion of my contributing to the literature of philosophy a minute treatise entitled *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, I was asked whether I had not been inspired by a book called *Out at the other side of Good and Evil*, by Nietzsche. The title seemed to me promising; and in fact Nietzsche’s criticism of morality and idealism is essentially that demonstrated in my book as at the bottom of Ibsen’s plays. (“Nietzsche” 94)

This review appeared in 1896, a year after *An Ideal Husband*, but suggests that Nietzschean thought had become at least somewhat familiar in English critical discourse by the early 1890s, since Shaw’s 1891 essay had been linked to Nietzsche.

Shaw claims to have originally derived his ideas for *The Quintessence* from Ibsen, not Nietzsche, but he sees Ibsen and Nietzsche as moving in the same tracks of anti-idealist thought.¹¹ Certainly Ibsen was widely known and discussed in England from the time of the first

public staging of *A Doll's House* in June 1889.¹² Although Wilde and Ibsen seem, on the surface, to be very different kinds of dramatists, Moi notes that Wilde admired Ibsen, and argues that “Wilde’s brilliant paradoxes, his searing indictment of moralism, are as anti-idealist as Ibsen’s turn to the ordinary. In its way, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* ... is as preoccupied with the battle between idealism and realism as *Ghosts*” (101).

In 1895, the same year that *An Ideal Husband* appeared on the London stage, Max Nordau’s blockbuster jeremiad *Degeneration* first appeared in English, linking together Nietzsche, Wilde, and Ibsen as part of a modern school of degenerate artists. It was to go through eight editions that year alone. Nordau’s volume originally appeared in German in 1892, and his ideas were already in some circulation in English-language periodicals prior to the 1895 translation.¹³ Nordau’s denunciation of Wilde and Nietzsche is based primarily on these authors’ diseased moral faculties. Wilde, he says, “apparently admires immorality, sin and crime” (320), and Nietzsche “is a sufferer from Sadism in its most pronounced form” who “experiences voluptuous stimulation from acts or representations of a cruel nature” (450). Part of the danger of Nietzsche’s ideas, according to Nordau, is his encouragement of the exercise of will over the capacity for restraint. Nordau counters: “The biological truth is, that constant self-restraint is a necessity of existence as much for the strongest as for the weakest. It is the activity of the highest human cerebral centres” (431).

Nordau’s text draws clear battle-lines between thinkers like Wilde and Nietzsche and conservative cultural forces in reaction against them. Given Nordau’s reliance on the doctrine of self-restraint as grounds for his argument, it is evident that a text like *Idylls of the King*, which emphasizes the Victorian ideal of manly repression, would have seemed an easy target from the anti-idealist perspective. It is also the case that Tennyson’s *Idylls* was quickly losing critical

favor as these debates were heating up: the *Idylls*, well-reviewed in the 1860s, were “reviled by critics only a decade later” (Felluga 784). By 1895, the *Idylls* embodied a set of values that was beginning to seem outmoded.

That Wilde’s play is interested in something akin to Nietzsche’s “transvaluation of values” is apparent from a joke about bimetallism made by Mabel Chiltern, the woman most convinced that she does *not* want an ideal husband. Describing how she fended off an unwanted suitor, Mabel says: “I just managed to check him in time by assuring him that I was a bimetallist. Fortunately I don’t know what bimetallism means. And I don’t believe anybody else does either. But the observation crushed [him] for ten minutes” (107). The humorous reference to bimetallism encapsulates the play’s broader interest in the loss of standards of absolute value. Bimetallism was a school of American economic thought that sought to tie the value of currency to the silver and the gold standard, not just the gold standard, for added stability, and to establish a set ratio of value between gold and silver. Debates about bimetallism show the underlying fiction of currency’s value. Similarly, Wilde creates a sense of moral vertigo in his play where the audience and characters lose hold of seemingly fixed values. Does Chiltern deserve punishment for his stock swindle? Or is his wife wrong for insisting on his punishment?

Despite Wilde’s bold attack on the premises of moral idealism, however, his drama remains disappointingly idealistic when it comes to gender ideology. Wilde’s play associates the social purity movement with moral idealism, yet one way to read this movement is as an attempt to end the sexual double standard by encouraging the same values for men (chastity, purity) as had long been demanded of women. The movement was premised, we might say, on a kind of sexual bimetallism that would fix a disparity between values for men and for women. Wilde’s play rejects the expansion of such standards to men, but, disappointingly, doesn’t challenge their

justice with respect to women. Near the end of the play, Lord Goring tells Lady Chiltern:

“Women are not meant to judge us, but to forgive us when we need forgiveness. . . . A man’s life is of more value than a woman’s. It has larger issues, wider scope, greater ambitions” (228).

Shortly after hearing these words, Lady Chiltern repeats them to her husband: “A man’s life is of more value than a woman’s. It has larger issues, wider scope, greater ambitions. . . . I have just learnt this, and much else with it, from Lord Goring” (230-31). Perhaps even more remarkable are Robert Chiltern’s words to his wife shortly thereafter, indicating that for all of his speeches asking his wife not to idolize him or put him on a pedestal, Chiltern still idolizes his wife as a paragon of purity: “Gertrude, Gertrude, you are to me the white image of all good things, and sin can never touch you” (235-36). Here, Wilde’s drama seems to share with Tennyson’s *Idylls* an overweening emphasis on at least one moral ideal: female purity. These remarkable lines are, indeed, so tone-deaf to everything that has happened thus far in the play that one has to suspect Wilde of irony.¹⁴ Perhaps Wilde is suggesting that the moral idealism surrounding female sexuality is the most firmly entrenched ideal of all, and will be the last to go.

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NEAR THE END OF THE *IDYLLS*, Arthur famously states, “The old order changeth, yielding place to new” (PA 408), positioning the poem as a lament for a bygone order at a moment of historical transition. If Tennyson looks back to the past, Wilde is focused on the future: speculation runs high throughout his play, given the central role of stock markets and global exchange of capital, and “the future” is a matter of frequent discussion. But the drama’s favored characters, Lord Goring and Mabel Chiltern, are those least interested in the future. Lord Caversham tells Robert Chiltern near the end of the play, “You have a great future before you, a great future,” and then turns to Lord Goring and adds “Wish I could say the same for you, sir”

(238). Wilde's final maneuver against his Arthurian source is to reject the weight of historicism with which Tennyson invests his poem. The modernism or proto-modernism of *An Ideal Husband* is evident not only in its break from the past, but in its break from historical determinism: the play focuses on a secret from the past that suddenly surfaces to threaten Robert Chiltern, yet he emerges from the play suffering no repercussions. The past is rejected and the present is divorced from the future.

Thus Wilde draws on Tennyson's poem as a means of rejecting the Victorian idealist past, and yet *Idylls of the King*, as we have seen, is far more circumspect about its own idealism than Wilde's play would suggest.¹⁵ As Catherine Phillips has argued, "Tennyson possessed both an idealism that wanted a code of monogamy, loyalty, and courage, and gifts as an observer of the world around him that produced a less rosy understanding of man's nature" (251). The poem, in other words, already encompasses an anti-idealist strain, inconvenient though such a reading would have been for those who made Tennyson the representative of an outdated idealist school of Victorian literature. Carol T. Christ has argued that "*Idylls of the King* was not useful for the Modernists" (119), but *An Ideal Husband* suggests that the poem was indeed quite useful as a foil against which a new, modern sensibility could be fashioned. In Wilde's revision of Tennyson, we find a clear example of modernist traction gained through antagonism to Victorian idealism, but a degree of simplification was necessary for this generational split to be effected.

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Notes

¹ Idylls will be referenced in abbreviated form (e.g. "Guinevere" will be "G"). References are to line numbers.

² As Wilde, who studied Classics at Oxford, certainly would have known, the words “idol,” “ideal,” and “idyll” all come from the same Greek root.

³ As Jerome Hamilton Buckley describes in *The Victorian Temper*, the publication of J. H. Stirling’s *Secret of Hegel* in 1865 “first awakened a considerable interest in Continental idealism,” and in the ensuing decade Hegelian theory and the “new idealism” had a major impact on British philosophical discourse generally and Oxford circles in particular (197). Wilde was an undergraduate at Oxford during these years, deeply engaged in the study of philosophy, but there is some critical dispute as to which of his Oxford professors most influenced his later literary work: the Hegelians, John Ruskin and his “moral aesthetic” (as Buckley terms it), or Walter Pater and his materialism and aestheticism. Most critics have agreed with Buckley that Wilde would follow Pater in attempting to “free art from the social and ‘moral’ obligations which [Ruskin] had deemed essential to its existence” (159), but Philip E. Smith II and Michael S. Helfand argue that Wilde “shared with Ruskin an idealist perspective and consequently an antimaterialist and antiutilitarian position in culture and politics” (13), that he was “firmly in the camp of the Oxford Hegelians” (17), and that he “disagreed with Pater’s conclusion [to *The Renaissance*] and its implications for artist and critic” (43). Smith and Helfand’s argument is largely based on Wilde’s Oxford notebooks and his early critical essays; a later play such as *An Ideal Husband* casts their interpretations into question, given that the play includes lines such as: “It is love, and not German philosophy, that is the true explanation of this world” (101).

⁴ Christ continues, “[Stedman’s] use of ‘Victorian’ to describe what he sees as an outmoded and restrictive literary style ... shows that the word from the beginning of its use as a literary historical term carried pejorative connotations” (156).

⁵ Wilde, by 1895, lived with the threat of blackmail for illicit sexual activities. Tennyson, too, was unusually preoccupied with the perils of publicity, and as Adams has argued, *Idylls* is structured by “networks of rumor, gossip, scandal, and slander” (“Harlots” 422).

⁶ Tennyson, of course, leaves out of his version of Arthur’s legend the story of Arthur’s earlier, incestuous fathering of Mordred. See Ahern for more on the implications of this omission.

⁷ Tennyson himself did not represent Vivien’s hair color, but artistic renditions often portray her as a redhead too. Edward Burne-Jones’s *The Beguiling of Merlin* (1870-1874), painted after Tennyson’s 1859 publication of the “Vivien” idyll, depicts the same scene as Tennyson and gives Vivien Pre-Raphaelite auburn hair. Wilde, a great fan of this painting, describes her hair as “brown” and “crisp” in a review of the 1877 Grosvenor Gallery exhibition, but it actually appears red-brown in the painting. In any case, Wilde’s admiration for the painting was clear: “Were this Mr. Burne-Jones’s only work it would be enough of itself to make him rank as a great painter. The picture is full of magic” (“Painters and Pictures” 222). In a 1912 illustrated version of the *Idylls*, Eleanor Fortescue-Brickdale’s *Merlin and Vivien* represents Tennyson’s Vivien with flame-orange hair. Five years after the publication of “Vivien,” Frederick Sandys’s *Morgan Le Fay* (1864) depicted another Arthurian villainess as a redhead, and Mark Twain’s 1889 novel *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* also depicted Morgan Le Fay with red hair.

⁸ According to Thatcher’s timeline of publication, the only Nietzsche work to appear in English prior to 1896 was *The Case of Wagner* in 1895. During 1896, in addition to *Twilight of the Idols*, *The Antichrist*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and *Nietzsche Contra Wagner* all appeared in English. Nothing else would appear until *The Genealogy of Morals* in 1899. *Twilight of the Idols* had originally appeared in German in 1889.

⁹ Some of the more widely read journals to print pieces on Nietzsche include the *Review of Reviews* (November 1892) and, in the United States, the *North American Review* (July 1875).

¹⁰ Wilde referred to this journal in a passage quoted in a June 1889 column of his “Literary Notes” while he was editor of *Woman’s World*.

¹¹ We do not know for certain whether Ibsen read Nietzsche, but it seems likely that he was at least exposed to his ideas through the continental press (Moi 196).

¹² By 1889, Ibsen had already gathered many English devotees. Havelock Ellis edited a volume of Ibsen’s plays in 1888, his interest having been sparked by the enthusiasm of Eleanor Marx and Olive Schreiner. See Davis, Ledger, Franc, and chapter 3 of my own *Slow Print*.

¹³ *Current Literature*, for example, published a review in October 1893.

¹⁴ Some critics have instead understood this strange moment in the play by considering it in conjunction with events in Wilde’s life. As Carol Schnitzer has argued, the play’s plot is “a transposition into more acceptable terms of Wilde’s own trepidation about his secret homosexual life,” and the play’s ending shows “his desire to continue with his double life and retain the love of his wife in spite of it” (25).

¹⁵ Indeed, a few critics have seen shades of Nietzschean thought within Tennyson’s poem (see Çelikkol and Ryals).

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