

# HENRY JAMES'S MORAL MOTIVE AND OSCAR WILDE'S IMAGINATIVE IMITATION:

## TWO APPROACHES TO COMMODIFIED AESTHETICS

by

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(Under the Direction of Kristin Boudreau)

### ABSTRACT

On January 5, 1895, the opening night of his play *Guy Domville*, Henry James walked to the Haymarket Theatre to see Oscar Wilde's new play, *An Ideal Husband*. Though the plays address similar themes of art, love, morality, James considered Wilde's play vulgar and feeble; he even prophesized the failure of *Guy Domville* based on the audience's warm reaction to *An Ideal Husband*. As we know, James's prediction was accurate; *Guy Domville* struggled at St. Alexander's Theatre while *An Ideal Husband* received rave reviews down the street. This incident, and James's reaction to Wilde's play, suggests an important distinction between not only the authors' fashioning of aestheticism(s), but also in their promotions of that aesthetic philosophy within a consumer culture.

In trying to understand James's little read and seldom discussed play, we must also look closely at the conversely popular and often reproduced *An Ideal Husband*. The plays seem to take opposing positions concerning sacrifice and duty; Wilde's self-fashioned character Lord Goring treats these subjects ironically, at least in his speech, whereas Guy treats them sincerely. But it is too simple to argue that James was distraught after seeing *An Ideal Husband* merely because Wilde's play pokes fun at moral rigidity while James's own upholds it. Why did James feel that Wilde's play was such a detriment to his own? And if it is true, as Freedman argues, that James reinforced his opposition to Wilde as a marketing method, why was he so troubled by the success of *An Ideal Husband*? It is important to read Wilde's play alongside James's; through such a comparison, we can begin to understand what James felt was at stake because of his competitor's production.

INDEX WORDS: Henry James; Oscar Wilde; Aesthetics; Commodity; Morality; Dandyism; Theatre; Imagination

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## DEDICATION

To my family, I love you.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

On January 5, 1895, the opening night of his play *Guy Domville*, Henry James walked to the Haymarket Theatre to see Oscar Wilde's new play, *An Ideal Husband*. Though the plays address similar themes of art, love, and morality, James prophesized the failure of *Guy Domville* based on the audience's enthusiastic reaction to *An Ideal Husband*. As we know, James's prediction was accurate; *Guy Domville* struggled at St. James's Theatre while *An Ideal Husband* received rave reviews down the street. James's reaction to Wilde's play, and his subsequent retreat from the theatre, suggests that James saw an important distinction between not only his and Wilde's plays and fashioning of aestheticism(s), but also in their promotions of that aesthetic philosophy within a consumer culture.

In his study of commodity and aesthetics, Jonathan Freedman positions James in what Freedman calls "commodity culture" and argues that the author is a main player in and, indeed a designer of, the British aesthetic movement. In his discussion of how James preempts modernism through his marketplace positioning, Freedman mentions the intersection of *Guy Domville* and *An Ideal Husband*. He writes that "Wilde's success...came to symbolize to James the decadence of the London theatre-going public" (Freedman 167). In light of this symbolism, as a marketing tool, and perhaps even as an emotional and artistic defense, James purposefully draws a distinction between himself and Wilde. James demonstrates this dichotomous positioning in a letter to his brother William about *Guy Domville*'s failure. He writes that:



Obviously the little play, which I strove to make as broad, as gross, as simple, as clear, as British, in a word, as possible, is over the heads of the *usual* vulgar theatre-going London public- and the chance of its going for a while (which is too early to measure) will depend wholly on its holding on long enough to attract the *unusual*... You would understand better the elements of the case if you had seen the thing it followed (*The Masqueraders*) and the thing that is now succeeding at the Haymarket- the thing of Oscar Wilde's. On the basis of their being plays, or successes, my thing is necessarily neither. (318)

In this letter, James refers to *An Ideal Husband* though he never condescends to mention its name. He also very clearly designates his own audience as the “unusual,” the elite, the isolated and Wilde's as the “usual,” the ordinary, the mundane, the “vulgar.” Through this difference, James realizes what Freedman calls “the notion of the artist as professional”; he plays the sophisticated, exclusive artist and thus draws respect, or at least acknowledgment, from a popular audience that he criticizes. He sets himself up in direct opposition with Wilde, saying “on the basis of [Wilde's] being a play, or success, my thing is *necessarily* neither” (emphasis added). In this sense, James distances himself from Wilde's version of aesthetics, though, as we shall see, their visions are not polar opposites (as James might have us believe).

As Robert Pippin argues, James's aesthetic vision combines an appreciation and sensitivity toward artistic beauty with a moral accountability for others' feelings. Pippin writes that the moral dilemmas in his novels “allow James to raise the question of the moral reaction without which the novels would not work in the first place” (Pippin 4). In this way, the aesthetic awakening of his characters could not occur without their moral cultivation. Pippin asserts that James ties the two positions, morality and aestheticism, together; not only do they coexist, but one cannot exist without the other. This kind of balance between the two positions seems to be at the root of James's aesthetic philosophy and, as I will argue, the author demonstrates it through his three-act play *Guy Domville*. Further, I think Pippin's argument about James's

exploration of moral motivations and the way the author makes these ethical intentions compatible with aesthetic pursuit can be applied to the author's aversion to purely commodified art. For James, art must serve some deeper purpose than mere marketplace value. Pippin writes that James, like his characters,

resists a facile psychological modernism himself, as if we could now see the true, permanent, unavoidable role of self-interest, ego, power, and lust in all human deeds, or the final impossibility of any morality, or the triumph of market societies and their now total manipulation of desire. (Pippin 28)

In this quote, Pippin unites self-interest, morality, and the marketplace. Pippin does not say so specifically, but I think he touches upon James's own moral issues concerning the relationship between art, morality, and commodity. The moral tension facing many of James's characters entails a struggle between not only serving, but intending, a higher, humanistic or artistic good rather than merely acting out of self-interested motives. This dilemma is one that James himself faces in striving for the financial benefits of attaining a middle-class audience (an obviously self-serving goal), while still attempting to maintain the aesthetic purity of high art. Through his portrayals of commodified art's aesthetic and emotional value in *Guy Domville* James finds a way to surpass a crassly commercialized form of luxurious aesthetics and suggest its deeper imaginative and creative meaning.

Several scholars have looked to James's novels to explain his complex aesthetic philosophy, but few have examined his plays as indicative of the author's aesthetic outlook. Rather, like biographer Leon Edel, most Jamesian critics analyze the ways James's theatrical experience figures into his development as a novelist and how his playwriting helps to both establish his "scenic method" and fulfill his ever-present wish to "dramatize, dramatize!" But an exploration of James's plays may further shed light on the author's response to aestheticism

rather than simply work as a part of his literary biography. I am curious to discover how a play—a form of literature meant to be *seen*—functions as James’s aesthetic production. James’s frequent emphasis on insight and vision seems to reinforce these eye-opening experiences.

The connection between theatrical art and aestheticism seems ripe for analysis given the movement’s value on seeing clearly. Aesthetic pioneer John Ruskin writes “that the greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to *see* something, and then tell what it *saw* in a plain way...to see clearly is poetry, prophecy, and religion—all in one” (qtd. in Freedman 10). Though this sight refers to the revelatory nature of understanding and appreciating artistic beauty, it also very literally relates to recognizing aesthetic forms optically. Through visuals (sets, movement, scenery, action) we can begin to comprehend experiential beauty. According to Freedman:

aestheticism represents primarily an angle of vision that aims at the purification of vision Ruskin sought but which increasingly discovers the impossibility of such preternatural clarity of sight; it privileges art not as an end in and of itself, but as a focusing or sharpening of the contradictions one thereby faces and as the field in which these wildly differing images wrought by so partially purified vision are played out. (10)

In this quote I read the “angle of vision,” in dramatic plays as symbolic of both the artist’s creative perspective and, quite literally, the audience’s vantage. Freedman says that “wildly differing images” “play out” in aesthetics, and I think his word choice is important. What is a play but a more focused, concentrated, structured and immediate attempt at conveying a message, or creating (at least attempting to influence) an angle of vision? Quite literally, through lighting, setting, and character-positioning, the dramatic form visually “focuses and sharpens” the audience’s vantage and understanding. In *Guy Domville*, James makes many references to sight and visibility and thus encourages the audience’s participation in and recognition of their

creative faculty. James not only desired monetary benefits, but also sought to master the aesthetically challenging dramatic form. Without the psychological narrator James uses in his prose fiction, the author's theatrical characters eventually see clearly, and consequently force the audience to see clearly as well.

One way in which James incorporates the style of a play into his aesthetic vision is through the phrase "on the spot." For James, who uses the expression as early as *The Bostonians* (1886), the phrase yields multiple, yet always dramatic possibilities. James uses this expression in nearly all of his novels and short stories and in numerous letters to his brother. Though he often uses "on the spot" in its colloquial sense (in this moment, right now), he also employs it as a stylistic expression of his aestheticism. The phrase's link to the aesthetic idea of experience and impressions is implied even by its idiomatic use; thinking, acting, feeling, creating, or speaking "on the spot" both implies urgency (and thus drama) and also the need for a quick, accurate response and a keen perception. The theatrical form, which is of course ever-changing and spontaneous because of its subjection to external circumstances unfelt by text or written word, further reinforces this aesthetic need for "on the spot" reactions. For the purpose of this study I will focus on its occurrence in *Guy Domville* and *In the Cage* because, as I will show, James anticipates and develops the phrase in his novella through the dramatics of *Guy Domville*. To highlight these nuances, a brief discussion of *In the Cage* is in order.

Published just three years after the production of *Guy Domville*, *In the Cage* employs what Jamesian critics call his "scenic method." According to Edel, James cultivated this approach to writing, which concentrates on dramatic scene rather than internal thought, during the years he spent as a playwright and thus enhanced the novels of his major phase. The tale is divided into succinct settings and moments, and James calls attention to the story's theatricality

and construction by describing these scenes in terms of their likeness to pictures, frames, panoramas, even stages. He writes of the sensitive heroine's meeting with her vicarious lover, "They were on different sides, but the street, narrow and still, had only made more of a stage for the small momentary drama" (James, *In the Cage* 263). In this example, James creates a scenic moment through his language and the street's framing emphasizes the staginess of their meeting. He performs this same function earlier in the story, only in this case, he incorporates the expression "on the spot." James writes of his protagonist's keen perception, "How did our obscure little public servant know that, for the lady of telegrams, this was a bad moment? How did she guess all sorts of impossible things, such as, almost *on the very spot*, the presence of *drama*, at a critical *stage*?" (234) (emphasis added). In this example, James not only associates "the spot" with drama and theatrics, but he also implies the young lady's sensitive awareness and imaginative capability to act on (or through?) the spot. Even the narrator wonders at her perception and ability to sense the "bad moment."

Beyond the heightened responsiveness that "on the spot" behavior and thought requires, the phrase also indicates precise locality. In *Guy Domville* a "spot" refers to a physical, topographical place. James's sensitive and noble character Frank Humber's emotionally charged and sanctified "spot" is the place where he expects an assent to his marriage proposal from Mrs. Peverel. He tells her "there's other good news in the air; the good news you promised, an hour ago, on this spot" (James, *Guy Domville* 494). A "spot," then, is capable of retaining an emotional charge or aesthetic impression, and these feelings can even float "in the air" surrounding it. But a "spot" is also a grounded mark or set, and in a play, actors must plainly stand on the "x" or "on the spot." In this way James very literally attaches the form of his art to the expression.

James takes Humber's sentimentality about the "spot" and expands on it through the young lady's experience in *In the Cage*. In this scene, James suggests the memorable significance a single spot, even a potential spot, can hold; the sensitive young woman wonders "what other spot his presence might just then happen to sanctify. For she thought of them, the other spots, as ecstatically conscious of it, expressively happy in it" (James, *In the Cage* 258). His word choice—sanctify—implies the purity with which he imbues the phrase. James first implies the emotional and aesthetic electricity that permeates a "spot" in *Guy Domville* and then develops the idea in *In the Cage*.

In addition to its physical attributes, "on the spot" means for James an emotional place, a site that is most sensitive to impressions. For example, in *In the Cage* he refers to "the sorest place in [the young lady's] consciousness" (240) and explains that she never "failed of feeling, in some deeper place than she had even yet fully sounded" (262). These examples demonstrate James's emphasis on specific emotional *place*, which for him, is a spot. In this way, James gets at the ever-evolving nature (she has yet to "fully sound" it) and the specific locality of the most sensitive, deeply impressionable "spot." In saying that she had not yet completely "sounded" the area, James gets at the sensitive vibrations that the "spot" receives. James finally sums up all that he sees entwined in the phrase when he writes that "All our young friend's native distinction, her refinement of personal grain, of heredity, of pride, took refuge *in this small throbbing spot*" (257). The word "throbbing" implies the "spot's" pulsations and sensitive feeling. James saturates the "spot" or deep place within her consciousness with her own impressions of herself (her cultivation, difference, honor). He also calls it a refuge, or sanctuary, which of course implies its safety. The "spot" then operates as a sort of aesthetic asylum, or

imaginative haven that shelters and redeems what the narrator calls the young lady's "little flutters" (258).

James also demonstrates a moral side of "on the spot." In *Guy Domville*, when Guy questions the moral outcome of his actions, the villain Lord Devenish replies that "as a man of the world that's the only spot on your glory!" (James, *Guy Domville* 499). For Devenish, a "man of the world" is free from a conscience and the better for it. Devenish uses the word "spot" to indicate what he sees as a taint, or glimmer of morality. That Guy would ask such a question, or care whether his pleasurable actions negatively affect others, is the "spot" to which Devenish refers. Thus James uses the phrase with a moral intention or message; a spot can also represent an imperfection. Ironically, what Devenish points out as a flaw is the same spot that James upholds as an ideal, an exaction, or a sensibility that may help Guy restore his moral character. As close readings of *Guy Domville* and *In the Cage* reveal, James's idiosyncratic use of the expression ties together emotional sensibility, keen awareness, and moral purity.

As editor of *Henry James: The Complete Plays*, Leon Edel tracks the author's experience with theatre and drama. Edel describes James's constant infatuation with the dramatic art, citing his frequent trips to the theatre, his work as a dramatic critic, and his alternate glorification and condemnation of the theatre's "conditions" in his letters and reviews. James "was a stage-struck boy, a stage-enamored young student, a serious-minded drama critic during his early manhood, and in middle life an anxious, over-eager playwright" (Edel 19). His ambivalence toward the theatre and his interest in the structure of the dramatic form suggest his strong feelings for the art. Edel finally describes James as an "anxious, over-eager playwright," and he attributes this rather poor evaluation to what he sees as the "disastrous" outcome of James's most famed play

*Guy Domville*. Ignas K. Skrupskelis, the editor of *William and Henry James: Selected Letters*, agrees with Edel. He writes:

It is well known that Henry James's books were critical but not financial successes...For whatever reasons, Henry did not write for a large public and, at least in his later years, was unwilling to compromise for the sake of popularity. But he approached writing for the theater with mercenary motives, dwelling in his letters on the wealth accrued by popular playwrights. And here he was willing to compromise...The failure of *Guy Domville* shattered his dreams of making a fortune in the theater. (Skrupskelis 315)

As Freedman argues, the “reason” James did not write for a large public was his method of elitist marketplace positioning. Though he initially strove to attract both highbrow and popular audiences, his experience in theatre catalyzed his notion of artistic isolation.

According to Edel and Skrupskelis, it was the production of *Guy Domville* that destroyed James's theatrical career, yet simultaneously paved the way for James's incorporation of dramatic form, thus enriching the novels of his major phase. Despite this fashioning of form, Edel also suggests that it is one of the reasons the play failed, saying:

Henry James's own plays were conceived with a general observance of the theatrical doctrines he propounded...Unfortunately the rigid laws of drama, as he formulated them or derived them, pinned him down...His plays became the prisoners of his theories. (36)

But though Edel makes this claim—that James's plays suffered because of their strict form—he never fully analyzes how the style and structure of the plays affect their content. Rather, Edel aims to contextualize James's plays, especially *Guy Domville*. Edel finally writes that James, while watching Wilde's play during the opening night of his own, “listened to the Oscarisms and was increasingly unnerved by the audience's delighted laughter...Henry James's agitation grew rather than diminished” (468). He thus relates the circumstances surrounding the play's production, including its reviews and intersection with Oscar Wilde's well-received play *An*



*Ideal Husband*, but avoids analyzing the significance of the play's content or the reasons behind James's agitated reaction to his competitor's performance.

My intention in the upcoming chapter is twofold. First, I aim to explore James's reconciliation between morality and taste. How does he promote the Jamesian artist in *Guy Domville*? Second, I am curious as to why James found *An Ideal Husband* so threatening. What does James's response to Wilde's play suggest about his own aesthetic values, and how does his deliberate opposition to Wilde implicate the financial fears he had for his own play?

## CHAPTER TWO

### MORAL AND AESTHETIC EVOLUTION IN GUY DOMVILLE

In his preface to *A Princess Casamassima* Henry James famously notes that in writing the novel's hero, Hyacinth Robinson, he sought to create a character who was both "finely aware and richly responsible." This balance between aesthetic sensibility (fine awareness) and moral duty (rich responsibility) is not uncommon in James's works. The combination of the two seemingly opposed positions, in addition to an artistic inclination (not just an appreciation for art, but an ability to produce it) forms the foundation of James's unique approach to the British aesthetic movement. This ability to produce art, like Hyacinth in the form of his bookbinding, is a talent that many of James's characters possess. Verena Tarrant, the orator in *The Bostonians*, represents an artist because of her fine speeches, though she lacks the taste and propriety of her friend Olive. Like Verena, James's theatrical hero Guy Domville is an artist because of his eloquence and turn of phrase. Guy is not only a priest-in-training but also, as I will argue, an aesthete-in-training and in this way James gets at the reverence of art—Guy's vocation is more his ability to speak (at first through charming women, and finally, in sermons) than his religious devotion. Still, the religious undertones of the play serve to deepen its ethical aspect and James's belief that morality accompanies art. One reason for reading the play carefully is to see how James resolves the seeming opposition between moralism and aestheticism; his play, structured in three acts, is one of synthesis and antithesis, with the first two acts representing one of these stances, and the third act bringing them together. How does James's style, which is so invested in the psychological workings of his characters' minds (at least in his novels) translate onto the

stage, where the internal thoughts and conflicts of his characters must be conveyed through subtle acting?

In his three-act play *Guy Domville*, Henry James describes an aspiring priest's conflicted decision between entering the Catholic Church and marrying to continue his bloodline. Through this dilemma, James tracks the moral and aesthetic evolution of his hero, alternately positioning him as an artist, dandy, and moralist. By imbuing Guy with a natural talent for eloquent speech, evidenced in the first act of the play, James suggests that Guy is an artist. Guy maintains this artistic production throughout the second and third acts, and of all the stances he takes and eventually comes to balance, his role as an artist remains constant through the play's entirety (with a few exceptions, which, as I will show, indicate Guy's moral wandering). Whereas the first act sees James in the light of a strict moralist (he shuns any association or reference to scandal), the second act sees Guy in a dandified pose and bearing a strong resemblance to the decadent Lord Devenish, his tempter. Finally, in Act III, James reconciles Guy's morality in Act I with his fine taste in Act II, and thus cements his aesthetic philosophy that morality should, and does, accompany true aesthetics.

James's premise in *Guy Domville* suggests that the writer struggled with the same artistic and social tensions felt by many of his characters. As Leon Edel notes, "the subject touched the novelist's life closely; it dealt with the conflict of many of his heroes—the question of participation and action in life or withdrawal from it" (Edel 465). This "question of participation and action in life or withdrawal from it" mirrors James's experience in the theater. As we have seen from his letters, he grappled with the theatre's "conditions" and ultimately decided to give up playwriting. In *Guy Domville*, this participation and withdrawal manifests itself in Guy's decision regarding priesthood or marriage. The possibility of marriage and love at first appear in

the form of Lord Devenish, his kinswoman's lover, who comes to notify Guy that he is the last heir and estate inheritor of his historic lineage, the Domvilles. Devenish tempts Guy with promises of glory, status, and ancestral duty, finally claiming that Guy's responsibility to his family name is stronger, and more pressing, than his duty toward the Catholic Church. The renunciation of his religious vocation is complicated by Guy's at first unconscious love for his neighbor, Mrs. Peverel, and his loyalty to his friend, Frank Humber (also in love with Mrs. Peverel). Through this dilemma, James portrays not only his hero's aesthetic refinement, but his eventual moral awareness and constant artistic production.

Guy's artistry emerges most obviously in his eloquent speeches. Despite the multiple positions he occupies, his beautiful expressions and articulate phrases mark him an artistic producer. James's first reference to Guy's fine articulation comes during Act I when Frank asks Guy to help him in winning Mrs. Peverel's love. When Guy asks how he can aid him, Frank says:

By speaking for me—by telling her to believe in me. She thinks the world of you... Your thoughts are not as other men's thoughts: your words are not as other men's words. (489)

His friend recognizes not only Guy's sway with Mrs. Peverel, but also his distinct articulation, and James alerts the audience of his eloquence through Frank's praise. He says that Guy's "words are not as other men's words" and to a certain extent he probably means that Guy's speeches have some divine power because of his religious vocation. But Guy's words also seem to have the ability to move others emotionally, without relying on his religious calling, when he is sincere.

Guy's ignorance of his strong romantic feelings for Mrs. Peverel limits his verbal faculty. When Guy first addresses Mrs. Peverel in Frank's favor, he seems to speak knowledgeably about

marriage: he reminds her that, “[Frank] will be very good to you...he’ll help you—he’ll guard you—he’ll cherish you. Make him happy...Marry him!” (490). Despite his confidence in Frank’s character, Guy’s words do not persuade Mrs. Peverel, which, as we shall see, is one of the few times his words fail to have the effect he intended. The halting punctuation that James employs, in the form of dashes and pauses, also indicates Guy’s if not faltering, at least jarring, words. In response to his plea for Frank, Mrs. Peverel degrades the value of Guy’s speech; she exclaims “That’s easily said!...Why do *you* speak of marriage, Mr. Domville?” (490). Mrs. Peverel asserts that Guy’s words, though “easily” spoken with the effortlessness of an orator, do not move or impress her the way artistic eloquence should. Further, she challenges Guy’s perception; he cannot fully see all of marriage’s components because of his limited vantage. In this way, James shows how Guy’s self-disciplined morality actually inhibits his aesthetic and artistic development.

James draws a connection between Guy’s eloquence (artistry and aesthetics) and his sincerity (morality) through his character’s inability to speak movingly during moments of deep moral uncertainty. These morally challenging instances occur when Guy’s emotional stirring disrupts his allegiance to what he at first sees as his fate and duty, priesthood. Though Guy can initially stifle these feelings for Mrs. Peverel, James’s villain Lord Devenish serves as tempting reminder of his near-renunciation. Devenish, who comes to announce Guy’s kinsman’s death, catalyzes Guy’s moral wavering. Devenish helps to produce Guy’s moral instability because he presents Guy with a choice: he can sacrifice his religious calling or sacrifice his name.

Devenish’s interest in Guy’s renunciation, as we learn at the end of the first act, is completely self-serving. If Devenish can trap Guy into a marriage with his illegitimate daughter, Mary Brasier (also the daughter of Guy’s cousin’s wife, Mrs. Domville), then Mrs. Domville will

marry him and rescue him from poverty. His luxurious lifestyle, as we learn later from his daughter, has been plagued by “debt and difficulty” (504) and Devenish needs the wealth of others in order to persist in his “fine living.” This, of course, is unbeknownst to Guy, and at this point, unknown to the audience as well. When Guy is first confronted with the decision of giving up his religious vocation or giving up his name, Guy tells Mrs. Peverel that his anxieties are “things I can’t tell you- words I can’t speak” (494). The “things” to which Guy refers—his feelings for Mrs. Peverel—are unspeakable because Guy cannot, or more expressly, will not, acknowledge them. Though Mrs. Peverel claims that Guy would be obeying a clearer call if he chooses his lineage, and implicitly herself, Guy doubts the motives of his potential renunciation of his vocation. He claims that his reasons for abandoning the priesthood are “mixed with wild thoughts and desires!” (494). These “thoughts and desires” represent Guy’s feelings for Mrs. Peverel, and thus Guy’s motives are “mixed” or impure.

Though Guy at first fails to convey his feelings to Mrs. Peverel, he at least seems to be aware of them himself. This makes his refusal to acknowledge such emotions all the more unethical; he chooses to deceive himself and Mrs. Peverel. Robert Pippin notes that “incomprehension [in James’s work] is often the result of stupidity or a self-serving refusal to comprehend” (Pippin 89). Guy’s refusal is self-serving because it protects his moral uprightness, and also allows him to believe that his reasons for giving up the Catholic Church are unselfish due to his love for Mrs. Peverel. Through Guy’s few moments of inarticulation, James suggests that Guy has strayed from his duty. Though his wandering is necessary to his aesthetic expansion and moral development, it also taxes his artistry in words, a quality he possesses at the start.

In addition to being eloquent, the Guy Domville that James offers his audience in the beginning is pious, amicable, and yet rather dense. After reading aloud the message announcing his kinsman's death, the catalyst that sets all of the action into motion, Guy vaguely recalls that Maria Domville is his cousin's widow. His friend, Frank Humber, asks, "The reputed mistress of her noble friend [the Lord Devenish, the letter's messenger]?" to which Guy naively replies, "His reputed mistress?" (James 488). Though Frank attributes this response to Guy's religious vocation (he admits "I forgot your cloth"), James implies that Guy's devoutness is not the cause for his density. Guy is either too dense to immediately understand Humber's meaning, or he is too virtuous and devout to acknowledge it. Still, considering Guy's gift with words, it is difficult to imagine that Frank's reference to adultery and scandal really eludes him. And Guy dismisses the idea that a devotion to the Church obscures his understanding; he proclaims "I'm not of the cloth yet!" (488). James implies that his misunderstanding is the result of something other than religious dedication. In depicting Guy's deliberate sidestepping, James encourages his audience to question his hero's moral motives. At the very least, we should see that his devout veneer interferes with his perception and awareness.

Guy's oblivion concerning Mrs. Peverel's love for him, and indeed his own ignorance concerning his amorous feelings for her, serve to further this portrayal of the unaware hero. Despite Guy's unconsciousness, James makes the couple's love for one another glaringly obvious to the audience. Mrs. Peverel acknowledges her feelings for Guy when she declares the sacrifice she has made for his religious calling, asking "Am I not bowing to [the Mother-Church]—down to the very earth?" (490). Though the audience's perception is heightened by this confession, as an aside, it is lost on Guy who might have recognized her love from various other signs. When Guy tells Mrs. Peverel that he "talked prodigiously [to George, Mrs.

Peverel's son] of his mother," Mrs. Peverel replies that "*I shall talk to him of his absent tutor.*" This exchange exemplifies how deeply their affections for each other run, and just how sorely their companionship will be missed. Further, it implies the deep impression that each has made on the other; they predetermine memories and reflections.

Mrs. Peverel's love for Guy is not lost, however, on Lord Devenish. The villain, whose name, as Hazel Hutchinson points out, resembles the word "devilish," perceives the attraction between Guy and Mrs. Peverel before they themselves acknowledge it. On returning to Porches rather than waiting for Guy at the inn, Devenish tells Mrs. Peverel that "anxiety came into being when, in the act of retiring from this spot, I had the honour to see you face to face. It suggested reflections, and I may as well confess frankly that it forbade my going back to this inn. It keeps me at my post!" (490). Devenish's "anxiety" comes from the perception of Guy's "anxieties" (his love for Mrs. Peverel). Lord Devenish realizes that Mrs. Peverel, because of her romantic though unrealized hold on Guy, threatens the possibility of Devenish's plan to marry the would-be priest off to his daughter. In saying that her face suggests "reflections," Devenish both attempts to identify with her (as one might with his reflection in a mirror) and also indicates his understanding that Mrs. Peverel may cause Guy to reflect upon or reconsider his choice. Still, Mrs. Peverel seems confused and refuses to accept Devenish's portrayal of her: "I don't understand your purpose, my lord" (490). Though Devenish's power of perception may be intact, his eloquence is questionable; his language is too crude to penetrate Mrs. Peverel's fine mind; she does not understand his *purpose*. Devenish, nonplussed, foreshadows the couple's future romantic revelation: "You probably will—when Mr. Domville does!" (490). At this point, James allows his villain to possess a keener insight and awareness than Guy. Later, Devenish asks the hero; "Have your pupil, and your pupil's mother, sir, never opened your eyes to another



*possible* life—the natural, the liberal, the agreeable, the life of the world of men—and women—in which your name gives you a place?” (491). Through Devenish’s question about Mrs. Peverel, James emphasizes the importance of vision (and, conversely, Guy’s lack of it). Further, he suggests that Guy’s blindness prevents his happiness and understanding of love.

Mrs. Peverel, though at first demure concerning her feelings for Guy, is later more explicit with our hero. At the end of Act I, after Guy learns that Mrs. Domville wishes him to marry, produce children, and continue the Domville name, Guy passionately asks Mrs. Peverel “How much of your friendship may I ask—how much of your help may I ask?” to which the lady replies “You may ask anything—you may take all!” (494 ). In this exchange, James leaves no doubt that Domville and Mrs. Peverel are romantically inclined toward one another. Not only does Mrs. Peverel reveal her feelings, she reveals just how much she is willing to give. Despite her forwardness, however, Guy seems to intentionally distort her meaning. At first he seems to understand; he asks “All?” thus implying his comprehension of what “all” may entail (a life and marriage together). After seeing Humber enter the room, however, Guy qualifies his question, saying “All that he doesn’t want!” (494). Guy then admits his moral responsibility to Frank; he cannot act upon his own feelings until his intentions are honorable. In *Seeing and Believing* Hazel Hutchinson claims that without a soliloquy to break down the wall between character and audience, the audience cannot be sure of Guy’s inner feelings. On the contrary, Guy and Mrs. Peverel’s dialogue and action in this scene reveal his refusal to acknowledge his feelings, and thus James succeeds in dramatizing the moment. The author communicates his character’s internal conflict and subtle emotion without an omniscient narrator (as in his novels) but through action, dialogue and “scene” alone.

Through Mrs. Peverel's subtlety, James introduces his ideas about moral motive and commodities. In the scene where Mrs. Peverel nearly gives her father's antique jewel to Guy, James uses a commodity very purposefully by suggesting that it can have sentimental, artistic, and historical value as well as the modern, flashy, luxurious merit that Lord Devenish attributes to it. The jewel that Mrs. Peverel plans to offer Guy, and ultimately gives Frank is, she tells him, "a precious antique that belonged to my father. I made the gold-smith at Taunton set it as a seal" (488). That Mrs. Peverel changes the stone into a *seal*, or an embossed emblem often used for imprinting and/or impressing suggests its aesthetic significance. A seal's ability to *leave an impression* indicates its link to the aesthetic notion of experiencing perceptions.

Mrs. Peverel's description of the jewel implies more than its aesthetic impressionability; James gives it a history, a sentimental past that incorporates lineage, feeling, and respect. Further, the gem goes through a physical transformation; it develops from a gem into a seal, and owes this change to an artisan, or goldsmith. Thus the intaglio combines feeling (remembrance and reflection) and productive artistry. Though the jewel has obvious monetary value because of its age and uniqueness, Mrs. Peverel seems to prize it for its sentimental and artistic history. She calls it a "gift at parting," but her meaning changes with each utterance. When she first uses the phrase, she tells Frank that it is a gift at parting, and intended for Guy. Frank reacts by speaking "ruefully" and "gives her back the box and turns away" (488). However, after Mrs. Peverel discovers that Guy no longer plans to go to seminary (and thus has hope that she and Guy may not "part"), she uses the jewel to distract Frank from persisting in his marriage proposal. She placates Frank, saying that she brought him "an old gem that I've had set as a seal" (494). Mrs. Peverel's words here denote the gem's value; whereas before, when it was intended for Guy, she called it a "precious antique," here she undervalues it, saying it is "an old gem." The jewel does

not, and indeed could not, serve the same purpose for Frank. The jewel, then, depending upon who receives it (for Guy it is a romantic token of fondness, for Frank it is like a severance package), takes on different functions and purposes. In this way James gets at the root of motive and intention and how they can distort or manipulate meaning. Furthermore, he implies the deeper significance of decorative jewels and art; even though the jewel is a superficial adornment, it has more substantial meaning.

Guy's response to adornment and fine clothes, completely absent in Act I, still does not approach Mrs. Peverel's sensitive awareness in Act II. Rather, he seems to respond to clothing and ornament in Devenish's reckless way. The second act is set in Mrs. Domville's villa at Richmond, and the Guy that enters the scene dresses in a flamboyant and extravagant manner. As Edel notes in his contextualization of the play, Guy in the second act is "a young man who...had been learning the way of the world from Lord Devenish. Clad in the costume of a dandy, full of swagger...the young churchman had been converted with great rapidity into a young blade, addicted to the joys of good living" (Edel 473). In addition to his changed appearance, his first words in this act are very different from his previous ones. He says to Lord Devenish that "I've been at your lodgings, my lord, to pay you my punctual duty; feeling that I owed you on so great a day an early visit and a close embrace" (James 497). These words are elegantly pieced and still suggestive of Guy's affinity for language, but their meaning is skewed. Guy uses the words "duty" and "owe" in terms of paying a visit to his scandalous friend, whereas in the first act he applied them to high-minded ideas like lineage and religion. Here, however, Guy's duty is a "punctual" arrival at his nefarious tutor's house. In this way, James urges us to recognize the satirical manner in which Guy now understands the meaning of "duty."

Unbeknownst to Guy, the duty he nearly pays Lord Devenish is not merely a visit, but an extension into the Domville family.

If Guy's first utterances come as a surprise to the audience in light of his former self, Guy's next lines in Act II prove even more shocking. He tells Mrs. Domville and Lord Devenish of his late night experience:

It was an hour, Madam, I admit, that left us no choice of conclusions. The bright star that commands my attendance had long since sunk to obscurity; that luminary, indeed, to find a single fault with it, shines all too fitfully and sets all too soon! When Miss Brasier vanished we went for comfort to my Lady Mohun—but her lady's comfort proved singularly cold—she engaged us deeply at cards. (497)

Thus Guy has evolved into a dandified sybarite like his guide, Lord Devenish. This alteration is evident in his card-playing and “comfort” in another lady's company; Guy no longer seems shackled by his virtues as in Act I, but instead partakes in licentious practices such as cards and gambling. Despite his participation in these activities, he still speaks about them with eloquence and grace. The “luminary” to which he refers signifies his late-night ramblings and how their only fault is their briefness. In this moment we can fully see Guy's transformation; his new stance is so opposite of his former that it is almost comical. This statement can also be read as an allusion to Guy's sacrifice and the life he gave up; the “bright star” represents his former vocation, or love, and its fleeting shine. Still, though his words suggest this meaning, they do not directly express it, and thus Guy is still unaware of his feelings and senses.

Through Guy's likeness to Lord Devenish, and his abrupt, rather ridiculous transformation into a dandy, James forces his audience to more closely examine his tempter and the new values he seems to have adopted. Devenish's love for fine clothing, wine, and jewelry is apparent in his constant references to plush items and his comfort. He promises Guy that “you

may trust your tailor when he's *my* tailor," thus indicating both his control over Guy and the importance he places on fine clothes. James makes his interest in superficial art and clothing apparent through his metaphorical speech about attire. Devenish first tells Guy that his honor, his lineage, and his duty are like clothing when he says:

Stand forth like [a gentleman]- one of the first, as you may be, in England! That character's a treasure that you can't throw away at your will! Your kinsman, just dead, dipped it woefully into the mire. Pick it up, and brush it off, and wear it!" (492)

In saying that he should "pick up [his character], and brush it off, and wear it" Devenish reveals the way he prefers surface style over moral substance; or if it is not a preference, he at least equates Guy's moral duty with his superficial clothing. In calling Guy's character a "treasure," he emphasizes his monetary interest in Guy. Because of his previously arranged bargain with Mrs. Domville (if Devenish obtains Guy's commitment to wed Mary, Mrs. Domville will marry Lord Devenish), Guy is Devenish's means to a wealthy and privileged existence. Later, he appraises Guy's worth again when he confesses:

I reckoned on your great understanding and the fine effect of your studies! If *before* our meeting, I attached a price to your person, that price has doubled since I've had the honor to converse with you! Your place in the world was in my eye—but at present I see how you'd adorn it! (492)

From this passage we can glean several of Devenish's ideas on people and value; it is not only fine clothing and plush wine that Devenish relishes and weighs according to monetary worth. Because he speaks of Guy as if he had a price tag, Devenish reveals his commitment to strictly material wealth. He refers to Guy as though he is an ornament or decoration used to "adorn" the world, especially the world of fine, luxurious living. His interest then in fashionable clothing and commodities makes no room for their artistic or sentimental value, like Mrs. Peverel's, but

rather emphasizes merely its relationship to wealth and status. For Devenish, Guy represents style without substance, an adornment.

While Guy allows for the possibility of an aesthetic fineness accompanying decorative material like clothing as Lord Devenish does, he also does not exclude fineness from other senses, like emotion and perceptive feeling. He seems to emphasize this in his response to Mrs. Domville's praise over his appearance. She says "You can see he likes a fine coat!" and Guy endorses her claim without qualifying it; he exclaims "I think, Madam, I like a fine anything!" (498). He emphasizes his ability to bridge both physical and emotional sensitivity when he jumps from speaking about his feeling to speaking about his tailor. He exclaims "I revel in all I feel. On such a day as this, it's universal. It doesn't even stop at my tailor!" (498). His thoughts on feeling and experience immediately shift to the lush clothes he wears. In this way, he seems to combine his sensibility toward emotional feeling with his sensitivity for physical feeling. Guy's feelings also refer to the expert touch of his tailor's hand, who in his way is an aesthetic producer (since he creates the overall effect of an outfit through tapering and contouring to curve). In this sense, Guy begins to cultivate a taste for fine quality and develop an appreciation for creative production which comes to resemble Mrs. Peverel's comprehension of art. Thus Guy begins to connect a sense for fine emotions and experiences, and a sense for fine material.

In this second act, Guy becomes acutely aware of impressions, including ones that imply scandal and debauchery. Following Guy's confession that he nearly lost his clothing to Lady Mohun in a card game, Guy wonders what a gentleman's to do when "a lady *corrects* the luck?" (498). In this phrase, Guy insinuates that Lady Mohun cheated or tampered with the "luck" of the game. This kind of interference foreshadows Devenish's future influence in Guy's affairs with Mrs. Peverel, but at this point Guy ignores the interference. Lord Devenish claims, "This

lady would say you're to take no notice!" (498). By making the woman to whom he refers ambiguous, James suggest the likeness between Mrs. Domville and Lady Mohun, two manipulative women willing to cheat to win. But though the Guy in Act I would have feigned ignorance of this suggestion as Mrs. Domville does (she says "What on earth does your lordship mean?"), the Guy in Act II is no longer willfully oblivious. He admits that "I won't pretend not to know! I think I always know, now, what his lordship means" (498). Guy further reflects on his former unawareness when he tells Mrs. Domville that "I don't know how good [I am], cousin, but I'm learning every day how ignorant" (498). Though Guy is frivolous and dandified, he seems to also be consciously evolving.

James deeply emphasizes Guy's aesthetically conscious development and masterful eloquence through a conversation between Guy and Mrs. Domville. After Guy admits that he recognizes his former ignorance, Mrs. Domville laments that "Your ignorance, love, was a pretty thing!" (498). Guy, without disagreeing, implies its tendency to obscure. In a moment of passionate fecundity he likens his naiveté to a receding wave: "It goes down like an ebbing tide! I pick up fresh feelings as you gather pink shells; and when I hold these shells to my ear I find in each the mysterious murmur of the world!" (498). Like an "ebbing tide," or a waning wave that returns from hiding the beach, Guy's ignorance prevented him from noticing beautiful, and perhaps more importantly "fresh," feelings which he likens to rosy seashells. The number of shells in the ocean and the number of feelings or impressions that a genuine aesthete can experience are boundless and ever-evolving, or "fresh."

Through this delicately designed declaration James insists here perhaps more than anywhere else on Guy's productive artistry. His ability is not only his verbal faculty, but his imaginative responsiveness to inanimate things. He can "hear the murmur of the world" in each

of these *shells*, and thus performs a creative function in the filling of these natural frames. If he can experience these impressions in seashells, then he more closely resembles one “on whom nothing is lost” as James says nearly ten years earlier in *The Art of Fiction* (1884). Guy’s impressionable depth and versatility (he can both receive and create powerful impressions) accentuates Mrs. Domville’s shallow pettiness. Guy distances himself aesthetically from Mrs. Domville in this speech, contrasting their reactions to experience; he emphasizes that “I pick up fresh feelings *as you* gather pink shells.” In other words, Guy expresses that his capacity to feel, or experience impressions, exceeds Mrs. Domville’s, whose sensibility is limited to material objects. Mrs. Domville, who can neither see Guy’s condescension to her aesthetics or his artistic creativity, coyly reminds him that “You’re a trick of fine speeches that make us women refuse you nothing” (498). Her word choice, *trick*, suggests her aesthetic limitations; she fails to appreciate the depth of Guy’s artistry and his lofty meaning. For someone like Mrs. Domville, who is incapable of seeing the beauty of art beyond its material value, his words would have to serve a selfish function. She assumes that Guy’s intentions are shrewd, his words a trick, veneer, or gloss over some other motive. Mrs. Domville implies that he’s all style, not sincerity.

Despite his swagger, Guy’s genuineness begins to emerge through his worried moral questions. Guy begins to question the sincerity of his motives when he tells Lord Devenish that he has sacrificed everything to follow him. He questions:

I don’t know what I could do, that I haven’t already done, to set such jealousy at rest. There’s scarcely a rule I haven’t utterly abjured—there’s scarcely a trust I haven’t rigidly betrayed—there’s scarcely a vow I haven’t scrupulously broken! What *more* can a man do for conscience? (499)

Through this statement, Guy first indicates his doubt in Devenish’s leadership. James attempts a sort of Wildean epigram when Guy ironically asks, after listing several heinous crimes, “what



more can a man do for conscience?" In this way, he makes light of morality in the same way Lord Devenish might, though in Guy's case, there seems to be deep-felt anxiety. Devenish, growing aware of Guy's dubiousness, tries to soothe Guy's fears with a distraction: pleasure. He says "What a man does for conscience, Guy, comes back to him for joy...my happiness is the happiness of others" (499). In this way, Devenish ironically appropriates the position of one who cares about others' pleasure, though really he is only concerned about his own. In first saying "what a man does...comes back to him" he sets up the contradictory nature of his next declaration: "my happiness is the happiness of others." In other words, his meddling serves himself, but masquerades under the guise of helping others. Guy, still unsettled, exclaims "Never once have I looked behind. I've taken what you've given me—I've gone where you led me—I've done what you told me...And is no one the worse for it?" (499). Guy's concern here is significant. Though he is yet unknowing, his decision to "never look behind" is another circumstance in which the hero fails to see or understand. Rather, through Guy's dilemma, James suggests that in order to see clearly in the future, Guy must "look behind" first. The question he poses, "and is no one the worse for [his decisions]?", suggests that Guy begins to cultivate an ethical awareness. His motives, actions and their consequences weigh heavily on him.

Despite Devenish's influence, at times Guy seems to second-guess his choice. He seems unsure of his abandonment of the Church (but more latently, his feelings for Mrs. Peverel). James makes this evident through Guy's soliloquy. He confesses "Truly I've traveled far from all that might have been, and to say the words I must say, I must forget the words I didn't!" (499). In this speech, Guy openly reveals his moral reservations, but resolutely resigns himself to his fate. The "words he must say" are his marriage vows to Mary and the vows he never

proclaimed to the Church are “the words he must forget.” But they are more than that as well. The words Guy cannot say are also his feelings for Mrs. Peverel; though he seems to halfway admit in this passage that these feelings exist, he remains willfully dense. Guy slowly develops his awareness, though remains initially ignorant, through his engagement to Mary Brasier, the daughter of Devenish and Mrs. Domville. Ironically, the woman he intends to marry to continue the Domville bloodline is not a Domville at all. Though we may perhaps forgive Guy for not at first perceiving this situation (since Mary herself does not know her parentage until the end of the Act II), we can at least criticize his density concerning the identity of her lover and cousin, Lieutenant Round, because of the multiple signs he is given.

Lieutenant Round, as we learn at the beginning of Act II, is Mary’s cousin on the Braiser side. He is also her lover, though shunned by Mary’s mother as unworthy of her daughter. When he pesters Mrs. Domville and Devenish to allow him a visit with Mary he learns of her recent engagement to Guy. Mrs. Domville tells him that “Kinsman for Kinsman, [Guy’s] a much finer figure” (496). Round understands her materialistic meaning when he realizes “Than a paltry lieutenant in the King’s Navy? For you I can understand it...” (496). Round refers to Mrs. Domville’s understanding of the word “fine”; she means Guy’s wealth and stature, not his aesthetic quality, moral stance, or artistic eloquence. She is unable to see Round’s merit because of his public stature; when she chides him for his appearance and plain dress, he replies “on calculation, ma’am, as you appear to despise my profession, or at least my want of advancement in it, I thought it good taste not to fly my poor colours” (496). Mrs. Domville emphasizes her inability to understand Round’s worth when she says “the taste of your calculations is better than that of your tailor” (496). Thus she overlooks his emotional sensitivity for his superficial appearance. Like Mrs. Domville, Guy is at first unable to appreciate Round’s fine qualities.

Guy is initially blissfully unaware of Lieutenant Round's true identity and in his ignorance, mistakes him for a toyman. In reducing Round to a "toyman," Guy devalues both Round's social position and the worth of his bejeweled gift for Mary (implying that it is a mere toy). When Round brings a ring to Mary, Guy assumes he means to sell his "pretty bauble" and thus completely misses the ring's deeper emotional and monetary value (499). Round corrects Guy, however, implying that the ring is not just a trinket, but an object of worth; he pardons, pointing out that "it's a gold ring, sir—with a pearl" (499). Despite the small ethical advancement Guy makes in questioning his transformation, he seems to erase any hope of his developing an aesthetically sensitive side when he gasps "Only *one*? Pearls should come in dozens" (499). In this way, James comments on Guy's perception of art, emotions, and commodity and alerts his audience that Guy is still under the influence of the materialistic Lord Devenish.

Though in his outburst about "fresh feelings" and "pink shells" Guy seems able to experience emotional and creative feelings about material objects, he as yet cannot fully appreciate or perceive the artistic value of commodified things. Unlike Mrs. Peverel with the antique seal, Guy is unable to see beyond the monetary extravagance of the gift. Round does little to encourage his misrepresentation as a toyman, and notably hesitates, as James indicates in his stage directions, but Guy does not interpret his meaning. Instead, he finally exclaims "for a tradesman, the fellow's blunt!" (500). Ironically, Round's tact is subtle, though Guy himself might benefit from "bluntness."

The ring that Guy delivers to Mary from Round has much more artistic and sentimental meaning than he initially credits it. Like Mrs. Peverel's jewel, the ring comes to symbolize "a gift at parting" between Mary and Round. What Mary and Round treasure about the ornament,

as with Mrs. Peverel and her jewel, is its sentimental and artistic value rather than its commercial worth. When Guy asks about its origin, Mary disguises its owner by responding vaguely, “[It is] from no one;” yet her urgency and, as James writes in his stage directions, “suppressed agitation,” belie her words. Guy, however, is oblivious. He informs her that “he [the “toyman”] is coming to see if it pleases,” and Mary replies that “It serves its purposes” (500). Through Mary’s reference to purpose, James reinforces the influence of motive over meaning. Because Round returns the ring, it becomes a “gift at parting” instead of a token of committed love; she calls it “a token of your inevitable scorn” (501). The ring’s significance changes; Mary now tells Guy that “It is a trifle—it’s nothing!” (500). Thus like Mrs. Peverel’s antique jewel, Mary’s ring symbolizes different emotions and aesthetics depending on motive.

In addition to the feeling it represents, Mary’s ring evolves physically, indeed artistically, when Round reveals that he had it altered. Through this character’s outburst, James suggests that combining feeling, art, and commercial value is possible, if done for the morally right reasons.

Round proclaims that:

They [Devenish and Mrs. Domville] drove me off, and I went—in the state you may think. Then I got back my reason, and it came to me that I wanted you to know something, on my soul, of what I feel! I went to the goldsmith’s in the town, and wrenching off that little ring of yours that I’ve worn so long, made him clap it into a new case. (501)

This example demonstrates Round’s keen perception and awareness. Though Mrs. Domville and Lord Devenish are only capable of seeing his social status, Mary (and James) can perceive his aesthetic value through his feelings and impressions. Round resets the ring that Mary had already given him as a way to impress upon her his intense sorrow; he wants her “to know something, on [his] soul, of what [he] feel[s]!” In this phrase, Round relates the ring and his soul; he claims he wants Mary to “know something, on his soul,” but what he acts “on” is the

ring. As in the case of Mrs. Peverel's jewel, Mary's ring undergoes an artistic transformation (in the form of the goldsmith's craftsmanship) and thus takes on a new meaning. Guy, at this point, can only appreciate the ring for its materiality (its pearls), but Mary understood from the first its significance. Round informs Mary that "Mr. Domville had done me the honor—he still does it, happily—to mistake me for a peddler!" (501).

In the same way Guy misreads the signs that Lieutenant Round offers him about his intentions, Guy refuses to acknowledge Mary's reluctance to become his wife. In an attempt to imply her reservations, she tells Guy that "everything has been thoroughly arranged *for you*" (500). Guy, however, enamored with the prospect of married life (and perhaps also willing himself to put up a brave, happy front), ignores this hint, saying "As things are arranged in fairytales" (500). Guy's acceptance of this marriage is partially a result of his dependability; he feels that he is fulfilling a duty to his family by perpetuating the bloodline. Still, his frustratingly blithe attitude and mawkish talk of fairytales are not only indicative of his strict adherence to duty. On the contrary, Guy actively partakes in the fantasy of a fairytale marriage because it allows him to escape his own emotions and hesitations about Mrs. Peverel.

Guy's response at learning that Mary loves Round (and that Devenish has used him) sums up the state of his aesthetic awareness in Act II. After realizing Mary's affection is for another, Guy wonders why she never told him. He exclaims "*I see—but I only half see*" (505). He is keener than he was in the first act, but not yet fully aware. Mary explains, "Our engagement then has been a bargain between my mother and my lord! My mother was to marry him if you married *me*" (506). But though all is in the open now—Devenish's fatherhood and the bargain between him and Mary's mother—it had to be explained to Guy rather than understood by him. Mary laments, "I suffered, but I went on—I thought I was gaining time.

Time, I mean, for you to see. But you were too dazzled” (506). By this Mary means that Guy has been blind to the feelings of others. It is significant that she mentions the role time plays in accruing awareness; Guy does need time to evolve, time to see, but in his self-willed density, the scant amount of time that Mary offers him is not enough.

Guy is indeed “dazzled,” and much of that awe and astonishment comes from Lord Devenish’s influence. James reinforces the association between Guy’s “tempter” and the decadent word “dazzle” later in Act II when Devenish asks Guy “Do I dazzle?—I love a fine odour!” (506). In this moment James suggests that Devenish has a narrow definition of the word “fine.” He is only capable of sensing it in material objects, like his gloves, wines, and perfume. Guy responds to Devenish’s vain inquiry in his typically eloquent style, but in this scene he speaks more ironically than before, embellishing: “Scented like a duchess! Beams of light in clouds of fragrance!” (506). Though his language is elegant and prettily arranged, indeed almost poetic, there seems something sarcastic now in Guy’s knowingness. Lord Devenish, holding out his gloves for Guy to smell, says grandly “Carry *that* to your nose!” and Guy, sniffing, trills “My nose is regaled!” (506). Guy is of course now aware, because of Mary Brasier’s confession, of both Devenish’s self-serving plan to marry off Guy and his illegitimate fatherhood. Guy’s exclamation about his “regaled nose” works to delude Devenish into thinking he is still ignorant. James thus turns the tables a bit. In the first act Lord Devenish was the knowing, insightful character wishing to keep Guy “blind.” However, James demonstrates a shift in both power and awareness as Guy sarcastically responds to Devenish’s vanity.

Through his manipulative, self-serving behavior and his contemptible, at times laughable, influence on Guy, James suggests that Devenish’s version of pleasure and aesthetics is unattractive and vulgar. His first utterance in the play demonstrates his baseness and sets him up

in opposition to the eloquent Guy; Devenish says in response to Guy's fishing habit, "Does he mean to *drag* 'em? I hope he ain't drowned!" (485). This exclamation emphasizes Lord Devenish's crudeness; he uses vulgar language and improper words and pronunciation. Unlike Guy, he does not possess a talent for expressive and beautifully designed speech. Though Devenish undoubtedly enjoys the fruits of wealth, his appreciation for such pleasures reflects not the refinement of a true aesthete or the production of an artist, but the insatiable taste of a sybarite.

Despite Devenish's materialistic decadence and his immoral disregard for other characters' feelings and impressions, James implies that his influence ultimately leads Guy toward a richer, more aesthetic life. In other words, Guy's temporary stint with dandyism is necessary to his development as a moral aesthete. It is through this association with Lord Devenish that Guy begins to cultivate his fine taste and awaken his aesthetic sensibility, at first solely to material objects, like clothes and jewelry, and then later to his emotional susceptibility. Before meeting Lord Devenish, Guy was rather unrefined; his home was above a bakery and he seemed unconcerned over the quality of his food and wine. After returning to Porches, Lord Devenish drinks some wine that had formerly been good enough for Guy. After his refinement, however, Devenish notes that "Mr. Domville would not like it now!" (511). Though he is at first sensitized toward luxurious material, Guy also begins to understand the fine feelings associated with his former friends, especially Mrs. Peverel. James makes his awakening more explicit when Guy helps Mary and Round elope. Mrs. Domville says that the choice her daughter has made, which was based solely on love, was a "fine one!" to which Guy replies, "It seems to me finer than mine has been" (508). Thus Guy has realized the "fineness" of love and companionship, and he also recognizes his guilt in refusing to see this fineness.

The end of the second act sees Guy nearly evolve into a “finely aware and richly responsible” individual. James emphasizes this transformation when he writes in the stage directions, after Guy has learned of Mary Brasier’s attachment to Round, that Guy “re-enters the scene as much changed from the beginning of the Act as between Acts First and Second” (505). Devenish unknowingly stresses Guy’s change as well, and how the audience becomes aware of it (through clothing). He tells Guy to “quick, man; change!” (507). Though he refers to Guy’s clothing, Guy has a double meaning when he answers “I’ll change!” and then exits; he of course means that his perspective and attitude will change. Devenish exclaims, “He’s half a monk still!” (507) which reminds us that Guy has not fully evolved; rather, the second act finds him half-aware, yet still in the middle of a moral and aesthetic transition.

Although he is unaware and naïve throughout all of Act I and most of Act II, Guy painfully begins to gain consciousness at the end of the second act as he arranges an elopement between Mary and Round. In the midst of these affairs (Mary and Round, Mrs. Domville and Lord Devenish) Guy seems to come to terms with his own feelings for Mrs. Peverel and he returns to Porches to profess his love. In Act III, back home at Porches, Guy asks Frank Humber whether Mrs. Peverel has accepted him and when Frank replies negatively, he cries:

Then, since I helped you, spoke for you, did everything I *could* for you, I tell you that she’s dearer to me than *life* and I’m not bound but free, and that I’ve come back again to tell her so! (513)

Guy acknowledges his feelings for Mrs. Peverel and becomes truly aware. But as yet he is not richly responsible. It is important that Guy first asks if Mrs. Peverel has accepted Frank. His newfound morality will not allow him to disturb the happiness of others or interfere without good intentions.



Though Guy's moral awareness and interest in motive first emerges in Act II when Guy asks Lord Devenish if no one is "the worse" for his actions, he fully realizes this responsibility in Act III. Later, when he realizes that Devenish has spoken with Frank, Guy asks Mrs. Peverel very specifically as to Devenish's cause: "what does he want of Frank?" (514) and in this way reveals his fears about Devenish's manipulative purposes. Mrs. Peverel, aware that Devenish's intentions weigh heavily on Guy's own choice, tentatively asks "can you think of no *good* motive?" (514). As Robert Pippin argues, James's characters have a difficult time "simply trying to understand what they most need to understand in order to make evaluations—that is, their own and others' intentions and motives, the right description of the action itself; broadly the meaning of their own and others' acts and interactions" (Pippin 5). In other words, Guy's morality is dependent upon not only his own behavior, but the actions of others as well. His feelings for Mrs. Peverel, though genuine, cannot be responsibly fulfilled. With this in mind, Guy's sacrificial response to Lord Devenish's interference deepens his moral aptitude. As Pippin later notes, James's characters' "moral considerations, of the obligatory and the forbidden, are most deeply (and uniquely) relevant where the reliance on others and some sort of possible trust is most expected and appropriate—as in James's frequent treatments of modern romance and marriage" (Pippin 27). Guy is intentionally unaware not only of his own feelings, but also of the emotions of others. Guy's morality is no longer in question at the end of the play because he has done everything in his power to avoid the suffering of others, and thus remains responsible to the feelings of others.

Devenish, despite Guy's knowledge of his immoral dealings, attempts to trap the hero in a marriage to Mrs. Peverel (after his marriage to Mary falls through). This effort signifies Devenish's devotion to manipulation as a means of positioning himself as Mrs. Domville's

husband. Further, it shows his flagrant disregard for the feelings of others, so long as he gets what he wants. As he tells Mrs. Domville at the end of Act II, after Guy has assisted Mary and Round in their escape to elope, “our contract stands...My task, Madam, was not to hold Mary—it was to hold Guy! We *do* hold him, i’faith—through the blessed lady of Porches” (507).

Devenish sees both Guy and Mrs. Peverel as ways to achieve his sybaritic lifestyle.

Ironically, in pursuit of the material luxury and aesthetically-minded life Devenish seeks, it is a sign of this “fine” living that incriminates him and spoils his plan. His gloves, which James uses as a symbol of Devenish’s reckless indulgence, trigger Guy’s renunciation. Because he leaves his stylish gloves in plain sight, the now attuned Guy recognizes his tempter’s interference. Before spotting the incriminating gloves, Guy speaks eloquently of the loveliness of Porches. He says “This old White Parlour has the friendly face to me! I’ve seen it, since we parted, in visions...It’s full of faint echoes and of lost things found again” (513). James calls attention to Guy’s beautiful articulation here when he writes in the stage directions after his speech that Mrs. Peverel was “coerced by his tone [and] wishing not to break the spell” (513). This sentimental outburst is romantic in its admiration of Porches and “lost things found again.” Guy’s acknowledgment that he’s seen the things he’s missed “in visions” stresses his newly opened eyes, and the intensity of the impression Porches left upon him. Further, he claims that those lost things are “found again” and thus he becomes one “on whom nothing is lost.” This simultaneous reluctance and embrace of time’s passing and the knowledge that comes with it is significant because, as Freedman notes “aestheticism in England represents the embrace of hateful contraries...the result is a complicated vision, which seeks to explore fragmentation, loss, and disintegration without necessarily giving up the possibility of reuniting these shards” (Freedman 8). In *Guy Domville*, James allows Guy the opportunity to reunite pieces of his

experience at Porches if he will profess his love to Mrs. Peverel. But the presence of Devenish's gloves ruins the chance of that declaration.

The sight of Devenish's gloves forces Guy to recognize that Devenish has interfered in his mission. Guy is on the verge of telling Mrs. Peverel that he loves her when he spies them. He says "better than anything I sought or found is that purer passion—this calm retreat! Aye, calm, Madam, save for [Devenish's gloves]!" (514). He tells Frank that Devenish, by forgetting his gloves, "betrayed himself. For a conspirator, he's careless!" (514). Guy means that Devenish is "careless" both in his forgetfulness and also his disregard for the feelings of others. His gloves symbolize the taint of dandyism that Guy has experienced firsthand. As Pippin notes, for James "the idea of a moral point of view [is] tied deeply to these notions of personal accountability and universal entitlement, and to the question of whether your action did take others into account or not" (Pippin 25). Because of Devenish's meddling, Guy is no longer free to profess his love for Mrs. Peverel.

Guy's bout with Lord Devenish forces him to open his eyes and recognize his own deceitfulness, mirrored for him by Devenish. Despite his suffering, the time he spent with Devenish in Richmond catalyzes his aesthetic enhancement. Martha Nussbaum argues that in *The Golden Bowl*, Maggie Verver's biggest sacrifice is giving up her purity of vision, and the relinquishing of this innocence is also one of the things Guy surrenders (Nussbaum 137). However, even after Guy is attuned to his previous obtuseness, and begins to regret it, he must still sacrifice his love for Mrs. Peverel because of his refusal to create suffering for others, especially if the cause is not worthy or pure of outside influence. He says "the high call I obeyed had a hidden vice, a fatal flaw, which the *other* call has not" (515). The "hidden vice" to which Guy refers is the capacity to cause pain for his friends and happiness for Lord Devenish. Thus

Guy's trapeze into dandyism serves as an awakening. It is after living with Lord Devenish that Guy becomes cognizant of the world and its interrelations, and as a result, dutiful toward his friend's emotions. It is not so much his moral obligation to the Church that keeps Guy from professing his love for Mrs. Peverel in Act III, but rather a devotion toward serving a greater, humanist good. James makes this clear when Guy asks Frank if he was optimistic about Mrs. Peverel's acceptance before Guy arrived back at Porches. He says "Frank—you had a hope!" to which Frank agrees, "Well, I had one spark!" (515). Knowing that Frank had a chance and that he is the cause of his failure forces James's hero to give up his love for the sake of his friend. This renunciation differs from his initial sacrifice in the first act because in this instance Guy is aware of his own feelings.

Guy's final moment of awareness comes when Frank reminds him that he knows about Guy's feelings for Mrs. Peverel. Guy, whose vision is still slightly clouded, responds quickly "You didn't know till I told you!" (515). Yet Frank replies honestly "On the contrary, you *saw* I did!" On the one hand, Frank means that Guy saw that he, Frank, loved Mrs. Peverel and thus remained silent. Frank also means that Guy *saw*, or understood that Frank knew about his love; Guy knew without being told, and thus he finally reaches a fine perception. But this victory has a sour note because it signifies Lord Devenish's immoral meddling. James writes in his stage directions that Guy "recalling, seeing clearly" allows Frank's words to sink in. He then accuses that "Devenish told you—betrayed me...his services are selfish...he got here first to practice on my freedom, on my honor!" (515). Through the phrase "his services are selfish" James again expresses a concern, and dislike, for self-serving motives. Devenish has deluded both Frank and Mrs. Peverel in his interference, and used Guy's purpose as his motive, thus tainting and making morally impossible Guy's own intentions.

In the same way he is “deluded by a delusion that was built on the injury of other” throughout his engagement to Mary Brasier (506), Guy’s potential but never fulfilled engagement to Mrs. Peverel is doomed by Lord Devenish’s interference. If Guy were to accept these terms he would be again willfully averting his gaze and thus undoing his moral development. Guy cannot stay at Porches because Frank’s love, or hope of love, between himself and Mrs. Peverel poses a complication for Guy’s own relationship with Mrs. Peverel. Further, he would remain morally and aesthetically inadequate or unfulfilled in such a marginal place. James emphasizes the ambiguity of the place through its name; it is like a *porch*, neither fully inside or outside. He would be in a “half” state if he remained just as he was in the second act, in the middle of his aesthetically moral transition, but really even less evolved since he would have to willfully stifle the knowledge of his previous experiences. Staying would mean fully seeing but only being half-responsible. Fanny, the intuitive and perceptive servant, notes the in-between aspect of Porches when she claims “There’s neither good nor bad at Porches” (509).

Guy’s role as an ethically responsible aesthete is enriched as the play progresses, and though his actions are often veiled as well meaning (such as sacrificing his vocation for the sake of his ancestry and prospective heirs), it is not until the end of the play that Guy possesses an acute consciousness. As Pippin notes, “growing hesitations, suspicion of hasty judgments, resistance to dogmatism and crude moralism might even be counted as a moral progress of a sort” (Pippin 12). James presents his audience with different versions of his protagonist and encourages us to morally and aesthetically evaluate the Guy of Acts I, II, and III. If we are, as I think James intends, to condemn the Guy in Act II because of his materialistic dandyism and reckless blindness, mustn’t we also denounce the stubborn density and willful naiveté of the Guy

in Act I, despite his seemingly good intentions? In mirroring Guy's obtuseness in Acts I and II, and then realizing his moral evolution in Act III, James implies that keen perception must accompany morality. He uses the structure of the play—divided into three acts—to emphasize each position: moral Guy, aesthetic Guy, and then finally morally aesthetic Guy.

Guy's experience allows him to evolve into a "man of the world," much like the one Charles Baudelaire describes in his essay "A Painter of Modern Life." Like John Ruskin and Walter Pater after him, Baudelaire's contribution to the aesthetic movement emphasized a keen perception and experiential understanding. According to Baudelaire, "a man of the world [is] a man who understands the world and the mysterious and lawful reasons for all its uses" (Baudelaire 7). Guy, throughout the episodes leading up to his sacrifice, evolves into this ideal, though in the beginning of the play he is the first to recognize that he knows little of life. He tells Mrs. Peverel that "I don't speak of [marriage] as a man of the world—I speak of it as a priest" (490). His preoccupation with worldly knowledge continues throughout Act I as he asks Mrs. Peverel what she knows of the world, to which she replies, "Little enough in this country nook! But I should like to hear of it—from *you*!" (494). Guy's portrayal as a "man of the world" continues in the second act when Lord Devenish calls him just that and Guy thinks it complimentary. By the end of Act III, however, he is disillusioned. He asks Mrs. Peverel "Do you remember how, at the last, we talked together of the world? I told you I'd come back to say more—I've seen it" (513). In this way, James indicates that Guy has experienced the world; he has learned to open his eyes to other impressions.

According to John Ruskin, a component of aestheticism is the ability to see and then describe the vision. He says "that the greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to *see* something, and then tell what it *saw* in a plain way...to see clearly is poetry, prophecy, and

religion—all in one” (qtd. in Freedman 10). Guy’s relationship to “poetry” (his beautiful words) and “religion” (his priesthood) are obvious. Mrs. Peverel further expresses Guy’s resemblance to this ideal when she tells him “You must describe to me what you’ve seen” (513). Guy Domville, as he is portrayed at the end of the play, embodies an aesthete in these terms; he retains his mastery of language, grows fully aware of the world around him, including fine impressions and taste, and discovers his moral duty to his friends. Although he is ultimately disgusted by the life he experiences as a dandy, it is through this living that he recognizes his moral and aesthetic sensibility. He must venture out into the world so that he can see and gain knowledge, ultimately becoming a “man of the world,” and in this way he develops both morally and artistically. After experiencing the world, and then reporting on his vision with eloquence and accuracy, Guy embodies both artistry and duty. Because of his eloquence, aesthetic refinement, keen perception and moral grounding, Guy represents James’s ideal “finely aware and richly responsible” hero.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### FILLING THE FORM IN AN IDEAL HUSBAND

To better understand James's little read and seldom discussed play, we must also look closely at the conversely popular and often produced *An Ideal Husband*. The plays seem to take opposing positions concerning sacrifice and duty; Wilde's self-fashioned character Lord Goring treats these subjects ironically, at least in his conversations, whereas Guy ultimately treats them sincerely. But it is too simple to argue that James was distraught after seeing *An Ideal Husband* merely because Wilde's play pokes fun at moral rigidity while James's own upholds it. Further, as I will show, though Wilde did not insist on morality accompanying aesthetics, he at least did not contend that the two were incompatible (since, as we will see, his aesthetic character Lord Goring has a moral sense). I am interested in why James felt that Wilde's play was so harmful to his own. And if it is true, as Jonathan Freedman argues, that James reinforced his opposition to Wilde as a marketing method, why was he so troubled by the success of *An Ideal Husband*? It is important to read Wilde's play alongside James's, for through such a comparison, we can begin to understand what James felt was at stake because of his competitor's production.

If Wilde does not distance himself from James's aesthetic style, he at least critiques it in his 1889 dialogue *The Decay of Lying*. In this piece, the critical philosopher Vivian seems to echo the author's own views. Wilde mocks that "Mr. Henry James writes fiction as if it were a painful duty, and wastes upon mean motives and imperceptible 'points of view' his neat literary style, his felicitous phrases, his swift and caustic satire" (600). In this complimentary insult, which James was sure to have read, Wilde implies that James's style though impressive, even



“felicitous,” loses its impact in its “motives” or moral duty. He says that James “writes fiction as if it were a painful duty” and in this way attacks the author’s *approach*. Still, though he mocks James’s interest in purpose and intention, Wilde at least accurately perceives the reasons behind James’s characters’ conflicts. As we have seen, James addresses this idea of moral motive in *Guy Domville*, and though Wilde wrote this piece six years prior to James’s production, we can see it is a theme James continued to pursue. Though one might at first assume Wilde’s stab at James’s “moral” writing would anger the author, it actually aided him in setting himself up, artistically and commercially, as Wilde’s opposition.

Freedman finally suggests that out of his relationship to Wilde, James “formulated his conception of the novelist as an elite artist—a novelist removed yet intensely involved in the gritty realities of the literary marketplace” (170). He writes that James:

took the stance of fastidious artistic dedication cultivated by the aesthete and detached it from what seemed to contemporaries to be the aesthete’s hedonism and artistic inefficiency; he remodeled the figure of the aesthete into that of the Jamesian high-art novelist—a figure, like the aesthete, of supple and ample consciousness (“one of those upon whom nothing is lost,” as James says in *The Art of Fiction*, in words that paraphrase Pater and that were to be lifted, directly, by Wilde) but one who, unlike the aesthete, is capable of acts of sustained and disciplined creativity and dedicated professionalism. (xxv)

This aesthetic remodeling, as we have seen, clearly occurs in James’s play *Guy Domville*. James appropriates the figure of the aesthete, through his dandified and aesthetic villain Lord Devenish, but then through his protagonist Guy’s moral and artistic development, shows the ways that Devenish’s philosophy is flawed. In this way, James deliberately extracts the parts of Devenish’s (or what he casts as Wilde’s) aestheticism that he values (impassioned beauty and fine quality) and then combines them with a morally motivated understanding that he sees as crucial in achieving heightened perception. Freedman notes that the Wildean “aesthete revises the nature and functions of the Jamesian artist” (168), and in response to what he perceives as a

literary attack, James creates Wildean dandies whose aesthetic claims he ultimately questions, or transvalues. Though Freedman exemplifies this textual appropriation with James's character Gabriel Nash, the aesthetic dandy from *The Tragic Muse*, we can certainly see *Guy Domville's* villain, the pleasure-seeking Lord Devenish, as another satire of and response to Wildean aesthetics. As we have seen, Devenish relishes extravagance and beauty, but his sensibility is restricted to material luxuries and devoid of any real moral sense.

A close reading of *Guy Domville* reveals that James wants us to reevaluate the purely Devenish (and what he casts as Wildean) aesthetics, and suggests that while we may not reject them altogether, we should at least make them compatible with a moral sensibility. James's insistence that morality and aestheticism be combined might seem to imply that any aesthetic philosophy that does not make the moral sense central is merely a crass, luxurious and commodified version (such as we see in Lord Devenish). As we shall see, however, Wilde is not Devenish, and though James sought to dichotomously oppose Wilde's aesthetic and commercial approach, *An Ideal Husband* demonstrates that Wilde also saw an alternative or redemption to commodified art: not morality, as James does, but something imaginative and active.

Oscar Wilde demonstrates the idea of critics', and as I will argue, consumers', creative relationship to art in his 1888 dialogue "The Critic as Artist." In this piece, Wilde's self-fashioned philosopher Gilbert expresses his belief that art-criticism is a form of imagination; he says, "it treats the work of art as a starting point for a new creation" (566). In this way, criticism inherently lends itself to creativity, and thus the critic is also a producer of art. Wilde writes that high art criticism "criticizes not merely an individual work of art, but Beauty itself, and *fills* with wonder a *form* which the artist may have left void, or not understood or understood incompletely" (emphasis added) (566). In this quote, Wilde enforces his belief that a critic can

invent or bring to art an aesthetic and worthwhile quality that the artist missed; a critic then *fills* the *form* that an artist creates.

In her analysis of *An Ideal Husband* Regenia Gagnier argues that Wilde “turned the audience into consumers” (Gagnier 108). Through his parade of specific commodified types and poses, Wilde presents the audience with their own fetishes. Still, through his reproduction of artistic type in *An Ideal Husband*, Wilde encourages the same creative function, or filling of form that he endorses in “The Critic as Artist.” In his play, Wilde tries to evoke an imaginative response by describing his characters’ likeness to famous portraits or statues in his stage directions. In this way, he assigns his reading audience a creative function that his play-going audience would not immediately perceive; we must “fill” these “forms,” or types with images. He uses a type, or frame of other artists’ making (Watteau, Van Dyck, Lawrence) to first describe his characters, and to then induce a creative function from the audience (the consumers, the critics). Like his stage directive narrator’s vantage, Wilde positions his audience as imaginative critics; we are meant to judge these characters as we might a painting or sculpture according to aesthetic principles of beauty and form, but we are also meant to bring our own creativity into the equation. Wilde’s specific reference to “types” and forms of beauty associated with famous painters works to provide the audience with one kind of style, but also urges them to, in Gilbert’s words, “put into it whatever one wishes, and see in it whatever one chooses” (567).

In *An Ideal Husband* Wilde explores themes of aesthetics, morality, and consumerism. The name of the four-act play, which centers on the consumptive and artistic interrelations of the upper-class, immediately lends itself to both moral and aesthetic issues: the word “ideal” can be used easily in either context. It conjures both artistic aspiration and ethical standard. But an

“ideal” is also a model for imitation, and this notion reinforces Wilde’s engagement with consumerism and his creative reproduction of types. Through his characters Sir Robert Chiltern and Lord Goring, Wilde offers his audience possible models of perfection or “ideal husbands.”

The first candidate for the “ideal husband” is the ambitious and outwardly moral Sir Robert, whose scandalous past and political betrayals put him at the mercy of a blackmailer, Mrs. Cheavely. Though Wilde entertains the possibility of his ethical and aesthetic worth, Sir Robert’s aesthetic and moral qualities fail to measure up against the artistic and imaginative capabilities of his “ideal” contender, Lord Goring. Though Goring enjoys the pleasures of life (discriminating taste, fine clothing, late night conversations and parties and what Mrs. Cheavely calls “artful living”) he also attaches more than a price tag and label to his aesthetic consumption. For Goring, and Wilde’s stage directive narrator, imagination is an active faculty; art, through its consumption or imitation, allows one to exercise it.

Wilde’s first set of stage directions immediately indicates the playwright’s interest in imitation and imagination. These directions, in which Wilde uses an opinionated voice, operate as more than simple image descriptions or stage instructions. Because of the witty and, at times, conversational tone Wilde uses in these allusion-packed directives, he obviously intended for them to be read. He begins:

The room is brilliantly lighted and full of guests. At the top of the stairs stands Lady Chiltern, a woman of grave Greek beauty, about twenty-seven years of age. She receives the guests as they come up. Over the well of the staircase hangs a great chandelier with wax lights, which illumine a large eighteenth century tapestry—representing the Triumph of Love, from a design by Boucher—that is stretched on the staircase wall...Mrs. Marchmont and Lady Basildon, two very pretty women, are seated together on a Louis Seize sofa. They are types of exquisite fragility. Their affectation of manner has a delicate charm. Watteau would have loved to paint them. (2)

Most evidently, these stage directions introduce three characters: Lady Chiltern, “a woman of grave Greek beauty,” and Mrs. Marchmont and Lady Basildon, “types of exquisite fragility.” Though Wilde does not associate Lady Chiltern’s construction with a specific artist, he still calls attention to her style by noting her Greek-like characteristics. In this same vein Wilde describes both Lady Basildon and Mrs. Marchmont, though in evoking their form, he is more specific. He writes “their affectation of manner has a delicate charm. Watteau would have loved to paint them” (2). Through this depiction Wilde associates the women in terms of a certain type or style of artistry associated with a painter, Jean-Antoine Watteau (a famous Rococo artist known for his portrayals of elegant women). Wilde writes that they have an “affectation of manner” and in this phrase an affectation implies their pretense, or artificial exaggeration; theirs is the manner of a manner, a style of a style. Despite the women’s contrivance, or perhaps because of it, they retain a “delicate charm” and thus Wilde admits that their imitative style and lack of substance does not detract from their beauty. In saying Watteau would have loved to paint these characters, Wilde first assumes that his audience is familiar with such works, and then asks us to imagine the kind of art to which he alludes. He depicts his characters not as real people but as works of art in the Rococo style.

The furniture and decorative tapestry are further examples of Wilde’s Rococo revival and also symbols of commodified art. The first, the Louis Seize sofa, promotes both a style of furniture, but also an expensive and coveted form of art. The second is the tapestry to which Wilde alludes: Francois Boucher’s depiction of Venus and Vulcan. Wilde says the tapestry “represents” the scene “from a design” by the artist and thus indicates that it is not an original, but a reproduction, an imitation. The picture, which conveys Venus’s “triumph” over her lover’s heart, recurs throughout the play; at the close of Act I, Wilde indicates that the “only light there

is comes from the great chandelier that hangs over the staircase and illumines the tapestry of the Triumph of Love” (32). Boucher’s design functions as a backdrop or frame, a recognizable piece of art in which Wilde positions his aesthetic characters. Wilde’s choice here is significant; it is one of the only works that he specifically calls by name, though he often refers to a general period style (Greek), or a particular artist’s manner (many of whom are Rococo). The reason for this decision, I think, is twofold; for one, this tapestry is an example of the way one form of art inspires another form. Boucher of course knew the mythological story about Venus and Vulcan; and from this creative expression, developed his own work of art that, though tied to the classical tale, can exist independently of it. In a further spiral of the re/production of art, Wilde “fills” this familiar “frame” with his imaginative characters and practices the critical/creative function he encourages in his audience.

Boucher’s tapestry can also be read as symbol of reconciliation between the play’s lovers, both Sir Robert and Lady Chiltern, and Lord Goring and Mabel Chiltern. The role of love, as determined most disparately by these couples, varies in value placement. For Sir Robert and his morally rigid wife Lady Chiltern love initially serves as a drapery or gloss over their pursuit of “ideals.” But for Lord Goring and Mabel Chiltern, who are less controlled by idealistic goals, love and art, present more possibilities. A close analysis of these characters’ aesthetic approaches to art and love, and the stage directive narrator’s treatment of their handlings of such themes, will reveal the philosophy that Wilde himself values.

The pursuit of their ideals and quests for admirable perfection limits Sir Robert and Lady Chiltern’s aesthetic appreciation and imaginative faculty. Wilde first implies Sir Robert’s unaesthetic quality in his introductory stage directions. Wilde writes that his:

Firmly-chiseled mouth and chin contrast strikingly with the romantic expression in the deep-set eyes. The variance is suggestive of an almost complete separation

of passion and intellect, as though thought and emotion were isolated in its own sphere through some violence of will-power...It would be inaccurate to call him picturesque. Picturesqueness could not survive the House of Commons. But Van Dyck would have liked to have painted his head. (5)

Wilde demonstrates Sir Robert's inability to balance his "passion" and "intellect" or his aesthetic fervor and his capacity to reason. Wilde says "picturesqueness could not survive the House of Commons" and implies that outside of this governmental setting, Sir Robert might have had the potential of realizing more fully "the romantic expression" that his chin reveals. As he is, however, he cannot soundly or confidently bridge his two sensibilities, the capacity to feel and the capacity to reason. The stage directive narrator seems to wonder at Sir Robert's struggle to combine his proclivities and thus suggests his own belief that the two faculties, thought and passion, can be compatible. Wilde finally writes jokingly that "Van Dyck would have liked to have painted his head" and through this estimation suggests Sir Robert's professional rigidity (Van Dyck was another Rococo artist famed for painting courtroom scenes) and revives, indeed reinvents, another artist's style.

Sir Robert's inability to reconcile his aesthetic and reasonable inclinations results in his materialistic interpretation of art. In a scene between Sir Robert and Goring about the former's dishonest governmental affairs, Sir Robert most explicitly demonstrates his superficial and commodified relationship to art. He explains the luxurious temptation put forth to him by his professional and aesthetic mentor, Baron Arnheim, saying:

With that wonderfully fascinating quiet voice of his he expounded to us the most terrible of all philosophies, the philosophy of power, preached to us the most marvelous of all gospels, the gospel of gold. I think he saw the effect he produced on me...I remember so well how, with a strange smile on his pale, thin lips, he led me through his wonderful picture gallery, showed me his tapestries, his enamels, his jewels, his carved ivories, made me wonder at the strange loveliness of the luxury in which he lived; and then told me that the luxury was nothing but a background, a painted scene in a play, and that power, power over other men, power over the world, was the one thing worth having, the one supreme pleasure

worth knowing, the one joy one never tired of, and that in our century only the rich possessed it. (36)

This declaration signifies Sir Robert's belief that art is tied to luxury and luxury is inextricably tied to commerciality and power. For Sir Robert the "tapestries, enamels, jewels, carved ivories" have value separate from their craftsmanship and aesthetic effect; they are commodities and masks that he covets; for him, they suggest power. In this sense we can certainly see shades of James's materialistic aesthete, Lord Devenish, who, like Sir Robert, is unable to forge an imaginative relationship to art. Sir Robert's memory of the Baron's "tapestries" further suggests the significance of Boucher's tapestry. In an effort to imitate his mentor's style, Sir Robert hangs a "The Triumph of Love" tapestry on his own wall (which, we might remember, is another popular reproduction or a copy of a copy). Though Wilde encourages us to imitate art in an effort to exercise our imagination, he suggests that Sir Robert's imitation misses the creative point. Ironically, the tapestry that Sir Robert chooses to mimic from his mentor's collection represents Venus's (love's) defeat over Vulcan (power.) Sir Robert's lust for power inhibits his ability to see the art for its deeper meanings and thus its ironic significance is lost on him.

Sir Robert's inspired words about the Baron imply the weight he places in his mentor's aesthetic extravagance and philosophical verbosity. He remembers, "he saw the effect he produced on me," and this language is reminiscent of the kind one might use about an inspiring work of art. Only in this case, Sir Robert speaks of the Baron's "gospel of gold" rather than his eloquence on artistry. Baron Arnheim is a producer—a producer of effects. He teaches Sir Robert that "luxury [is] nothing but a background, a painted scene in a play." In this sense, luxury (which Sir Robert translates as art) is superficial, a veneer. In having his character say art is "a background" or like scene in a play, Wilde suggests that Baron Arnheim, and consequently



Sir Robert, cannot see beyond the superficial, and while the surface is valuable, it cannot exist alone. The visual and surface effects of a play are only one side of the theatrical coin; beyond the curtain and scenery sets are the bulky light fixtures, the knots, the pulleys, the mechanics behind the scenes or surface. The backstage crew members are as much creators, or conveyors, of art as the actors on stage. Like the scenery of a play, which obscures or hides the action behind it, the luxurious, artistic backgrounds of the Baron's and Sir Robert's lives hide their true passions: money and power. They use their art to flaunt their power.

Lady Chiltern, while less concerned with materialism, defines her "ideal" in terms of moral purity, ethical spotlessness, and innate distinction. When she learns of her husband's former (and potential future) scandals, she exclaims:

You are different. All your life you have stood apart from others. You have never let the world soil you. 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, dishonored. 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! (30)

Lady Chiltern's imagery in the phrase "that tower of ivory do not destroy" reminds us of the "ivories" that Sir Robert admired in Baron Arnheim's home, only Lady Chiltern attaches a much different meaning to the pearly carved tusks than her husband and his mentor. In her interpretation of ivory, she shapes it as a tower on which her husband's perfect ethics reside. After realizing that this tower is ethically fallible, and that the purely white ivory can be "stained," Lady Chiltern demonstrates the link she sees between aesthetic surfaces and moral reputations. Further, she reinforces the role love plays in her pursuit of the ideal. She cries, "we women worship when we love...don't kill my love [my idealistic interpretation] for you..." In this way, she conveys the significant role perfection and idealism plays in her feeling of love; she

even equates her worship with her love and implies that it will be lost if what she sees as Sir Robert's moral duty goes unfulfilled.

Mabel Chiltern and Lord Goring take a different, less idealistic and more imaginative approach to both art and love than their counter figures, Gertrude Chiltern and Sir Robert. Though Mabel does not actively seek the perfection of others, she herself clearly resembles at least an English ideal of beauty. The stage directions describe her as

a perfect example of the English type of prettiness, the apple-blossom type. She has all the fragrance and freedom of a flower. There is ripple after ripple of sunlight in her hair, and the little mouth, with its parted lips, is expectant, like the mouth of a child. She has the fascinating tyranny of youth, and the astonishing courage of innocence. To sane people she is not reminiscent of any work of art. But she is really like a Tanagra statuette, and would be rather annoyed if she were told so. (3)

In this introduction to Mabel, Wilde again highlights his reproduction of not only type but idealistic type. He says that she is a "perfect example" or model to imitate. Mabel's "apple-blossom type" is innocent, blossoming; she is like a flower. Wilde's eloquent verbiage about the "ripple after ripple of sunlight in her hair" reinforces her idealistic beauty. Wilde concludes that "to sane people she is not reminiscent of any work of art" and then ironically categorizes himself among those who are not sane. He admits that she reminds him of a "Tanagra statuette" and then predicts her feelings of annoyance regarding that allusion. This prediction is important because it *imagines* her reaction to such an association; she "would be" annoyed. In this moment, the stage directions disclose both Mabel's and the Wilde's feelings on idealism. For Mabel, it is not a state to which she aspires or even seeks in others, and this might explain her annoyance at being compared to a symbol of perfection, the Tanagra. For Wilde, the idealistic type he describes can only exist in art, and though he at first teases the idea of her human perfection, "she is not reminiscent of any work of art," he quickly revises his statement by saying "but she is

really like a Tanagra statuette.” Despite her irritation at resembling the Greek statue, however, Mabel willingly participates in recreating Boucher’s design.

Mabel’s interaction with Boucher’s tapestry is far more creative than Sir Robert’s empty imitation of Arnheim’s gallery. In Act II, Mabel Chiltern and Lady Basildon perform a reenactment of Boucher’s scene, thus positioning themselves as pieces of art, and also imitating a familiar style. Mabel tells Lord Goring and Lady Chiltern that “we are having a tableaux...The Triumph of something, I don’t know what! I hope it is the triumph of me!” (49). The tableaux (or picturesque grouping of people) that Mabel refers to, the “Triumph of something,” is of course Boucher’s “Triumph of Love.” She determines, “I hope it is the triumph of me” and thus foreshadows her eventual romantic defeat of Lord Goring. In this way she hopes for life to imitate art or her own flirtatious relationship with Goring to result in a marriage proposal. She tells them that “I am just off to rehearsal. I have got to stand on my head in some tableaux...it is for an excellent charity: in aid of the Undeserving, the only people I am really interested in” (50). In this quote, Mabel reveals several characteristics: one, her creativity; she is posing as if for a portrait, but altering the position of the subject (she “stands on her head” and thus changes the perspective of the work for both the critical viewers and/or artistic participants). But her position is learned, imitated, and “rehearsed.” Though she manipulates the vantage or style of the artwork, she still begins the imaginative process at Boucher’s evocation. Finally, she reveals her agency as art; she uses it for charity, yet she skews the notion by ironically calling the needy “undeserving” and thus turns the idea of charity “on its head.” She performs a function similar to what Wilde asks of his audience.

Unlike Lady Chiltern, Mabel persists in a lack of duty in her engagement (and presumably in her marriage) to Lord Goring. When he tells her that he is selfish, she responds

that “I delight in your bad qualities. I wouldn’t have you part with one of them” (11). In this way she embraces his entire character rather than measuring him against an ideal. She further emphasizes her ambivalence toward duty in love when she says of remaining with Lord Goring “Well, my duty is a thing I never do, on principle. It always depresses me” (91). Paradoxically, her duty to herself is to avoid duties to others. Mabel distances herself aesthetically from Lady Chiltern, especially through desiring the diamond: “I wish [the diamond brooch] was mine, but Gertrude won’t let me wear anything but pearls, and I am so thoroughly sick of pearls. They make one look so plain, so good and so intellectual” (26). The style or type that Lady Chiltern forces upon Mabel inhibits her own creative response to decorative style. She finally sums up her feelings on achieving the ideal when she describes her feelings on marriage; she exclaims “an ideal husband! Oh, I don’t think I should want that. It sounds like something in the next world” (107). In this declaration Mabel enforces her belief that an ideal exists beyond reality, somewhere within the imaginative realm, and necessarily just beyond realization.

Mabel’s sense that ideality exists in art, but not in reality, is lucky for her suitor, Lord Goring, whose flaws his father, Lord Caversham, points out throughout the play’s entirety. When Mabel Chiltern says that he is “always telling [her] of his bad qualities” he responds that they are “...quite dreadful! When I think of them at night I go to sleep at once” (11). In this epigrammatic expression of Wildean fame, Goring treats his flaws glibly. Lord Caversham points out his perception of his son’s defunct principles when he says “You seem to me to be living entirely for pleasure,” and Goring cements this belief by saying “What else is there to live for, father?” (13). Through these conversations, Wilde urges us to associate Goring with idleness and pleasure-seeking, not responsibility and ethics. His idealness, then, fulfills the standards of a dandy, but Wilde suggests that his consciousness and philosophy are deeper than that because of

Goring's own self-examination and confession. His seemingly unethical indulgence in luxury and art has no effect on his moral awareness.

Wilde clearly views Goring differently than Lord Caversham. Whereas Caversham finds many faults in his son, Wilde indicates in stage directions that he is a "flawless dandy." He writes:

Enter Lord Goring. 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. (10)

Wilde does not compare Goring to another work of art or artist. This absence is important in that it forces the reader to exercise more imagination. Without a "type" invented by another artist, or another style, form, "frame" of reference, the reader must perform a more thorough creative act. Wilde emphasizes Goring's likeness not to another work but rather to a blank canvas when he says that he has "an expressionless face." Goring's general outlook seems facetious and superficial; Wilde says "he plays with life," and this waggishness also implies his immoral stance. Wilde further suggests Goring's idleness when he writes in the stage directions of Act II that "Lord Goring, dressed in the height of fashion, is lounging in an armchair" (33). This description shows both Goring's foppishness and his idleness. As in Mabel's case, the stage directions predict Goring's "annoyance" at being called "romantic" or "clever." In this way Wilde suggests that like Sir Robert, Goring also struggles to reconcile his propensities; he is clever, but resists his intellect in favor of his dandified pose. Later, however, especially in Act III, Wilde suggests Goring's balance between his aesthetic inclination and his intellectual ability.

The stage directions in the third act depict Goring in a more serious, interior light, though his surface style and interest in clothing remain intact. Wilde writes in his stage directions that Goring enters:

In evening dress with a buttonhole. He is wearing a silk hat and Inverness cape. White-gloved, he carries a Louis Seize cane. His are all the delicate fopperies of Fashion. One sees that he stands in immediate relation to modern life, makes it indeed, and so masters it. He is the first well-dressed philosopher in the history of thought. (67)

In this passage, Wilde makes further evident that Goring shares some of his own attributes; they both dress with meticulous care, especially concerning their flowers and buttonholes. More than this, Goring exudes an aesthetic specific to crafted art rather than painted art. In other words, whereas other characters are defined by their likeness to specific artists' types, Goring derives his type from the products he wears, and implicitly, buys. Wilde carefully mentions Goring's clothing in nearly all of his descriptions, and not just generally, such as he is "the height of fashion," but specifically, recalling styles like the Inverness cape and the Louis Seize cane. This particularity signifies not only an concern for style but quality and artistry.

What I find most interesting about these stage directions is the way that Wilde shifts between seemingly superficial issues, like fashion and dress, and more ethically-minded ideas, like philosophy and personal doctrine. In calling Goring a "philosopher" Wilde removes, or at least complicates, the immoral stigma attached to dandyism. He writes that Goring is "the first well-dressed philosopher in the history of thought" (67) and thus paradoxically combines an attention to style with an interest in thought. Finally, Wilde notes that Goring "stands in immediate relation to modern life, makes it indeed, and so masters it" (67). This artistic language conjures the notion of a creator; Goring's "immediate relation to modern life" is his ability to promote certain styles, and in this promotion, guide the public's tastes. Wilde

emphasizes his creative production by calling him a “maker,” and finally, like a true artist, a “master.” As a master, Goring resembles an ideal or model to learn from.

Through these stage directions, Wilde prepares his reading audience for Goring’s moral and tactful acts. A subject he treats flippantly in conversation—at one point he says that “it is the growth of the moral sense in women that makes marriage such a hopeless, one-sided institution” (63)—he regards rather strictly in practice, and acts with surprising tact for others’ feelings. He satisfies his duty to Mabel Chiltern through their engagement and helps patch up Sir Robert’s marriage with his morally stern, and initially unaware, wife. Though he placates the Chilterns by engaging in their secrets, he always urges them to act honestly. For example, when Sir Robert asks for advice, Lord Goring tells him that “You must begin [setting things right] by telling your wife the whole story” (39). Sir Robert refuses, however, and through this disagreement, Wilde implies their moral difference. Gagnier writes that Goring

is only one character in *An Ideal Husband*, the only character that our own contemporary critics are likely to call principled, who is implicated in neither the glitter of the artistic shams nor the seriousness of the offense...Goring’s insistence on staying out of politics is a direct foil to Chiltern’s corrupt luxuriousness and hypocritical idealism. (131).

Through Goring’s honest behavior, Wilde allows that morality may accompany aesthetics, though he doesn’t seem to believe that it must. Goring acts but does not speak morally and Sir Robert does the opposite.

If Sir Robert’s materialistic ambition and immoral dishonesty serve to foil Lord Goring’s artistic promotion and if not moral, at least amoral advice, Mrs. Cheavely stands as an even deeper parallel to his aesthetic doctrine. Though Wilde finally suggests their difference, he at first implies their similarities. As with Goring, Wilde does not describe Mrs. Cheavely in terms of another famous artist’s type. Like Goring, Mrs. Cheavely also initially seems superficial

(though unlike Goring her actions are morally unjust). She makes her moral position clear when she says “Morality is simply the attitude we adopt towards people whom we personally dislike” (57). Wilde’s stage directions address the lady’s physical appearance, her surface, rather than her interior. Wilde writes that she:

Is tall, and rather slight. Lips very thin and highly-coloured, a line of scarlet on a pallid face. Venetian red hair, aquiline nose, and long throat. Rouge accentuates the natural paleness of her complexion. Gray-green eyes that move restlessly. She is in heliotrope, with diamonds she looks rather like an orchid, and makes great demands on one’s curiosity. In all her movements she is extremely graceful. A work of art on the whole, but showing the influence of too many schools. (4)

This commentary implies Mrs. Cheavely’s likeness to a blank canvas or unfinished piece. Wilde seems to paint on her as he would a palette; he draws her “lips very thin and highly-colored, a line of scarlet on a pallid face.” Her rouge, or paint, enhances her “natural paleness,” but also emphasizes her artifice. Mrs. Cheavely is the most made-up (in terms of flashy dress and cosmetics) and also the character most linked to masks. In this way, Wilde asserts her surface style but obscures her interiority.

Mrs. Cheavely and Lord Goring finally differ in their relationship to commodified art and decorative style. Like Goring, Mrs. Cheavely is often described in terms of what she is wearing. Despite this likeness, however, Wilde implies that Mrs. Cheavely’s consumption is dangerous whereas Goring’s is not. Her greed, and viewing of art and craft as mere commodity, ultimately defeat her. Wilde demonstrates the way her consumption leads to her downfall symbolically through her capture. Goring, aware that Mrs. Cheavely thieved the jewel she claims to have lost, literally traps her using the diamond brooch. Goring tells her that “the drawback of stealing a thing, Mrs. Cheavely, is that one never knows how wonderful the thing that one steals is. You can’t get the bracelet off, unless you know where the spring is. And I see you don’t know where the spring is” (82). In this quote, Goring reveals the value he assigns craftsmanship. Mrs.



Cheavely, who used the jewel as mere ornamentation and commodified symbol, never takes the time to understand the craftsmanship behind the style and thus cannot fully understand it. Wilde, through Goring, does not flaunt a vulgar, purely commodified consumption, but rather urges a thoughtful, and aesthetic, understanding of the commodity.

Wilde's attention to style in *An Ideal Husband* functions as a promotion, and his interest in surface is also reflected in his reference to fashionable (and expensive) clothing and jewelry. His blatant reinforcement of high aesthetic fashions of the time (Louis Seize, hair e la marquise, décolleté collars) not only support Wilde's interest in style, but also imply the commodification of art. The buying and selling of letters, jewelry, even people (who are already defined by their aesthetic quality) further emphasizes the commercial value of art. Using his characters' consumption of art, and implicitly, his own as well as his audience's, Wilde blurs the line between consumer and producer. Wilde's consumptive dandy Lord Goring not only consumes art (through both his participation in the affairs of picturesque characters and his indulgence in fashionable clothes), but also produces it through his mode of living. In this way, Wilde indicates that Goring is both consumer and producer. Through this ambivalent duality, Wilde shows the relationship between aestheticism and professionalism and also expresses a notion that the consumer is a critic is an artist.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CONCLUSION

As we have seen, James and Wilde both sought an alternative to purely commodified art. In *Guy Domville* James demonstrates the relationships amongst artistry, emotion, and the commodity through Mrs. Peverel's jeweled antique seal and Lieutenant Round's pearl encased ring. Though James admits the commodified value of these pieces, he seems more invested in their emotional worth. Guy is initially unable to perceive the sentimental importance of these objects, but the end of the play finds him more sensitively aware of the feelings attached to material. Further, James insists on the artistry of the seal and ring because of the physical transformation each of them go through as a reflection of their emotional merit.

Though James upholds some aesthetic commodities as worthwhile, he also warns us against the solely materialistic aesthetics endorsed by Lord Devenish. Devenish's gloves, a symbol of his dandyism and sybaritic taste, are for Guy representative of his unethical interference. James suggests his distaste for the materialistic aesthetics that Devenish relishes by showing us Guy's stint with the dandy and then his ultimate aversion from such a lifestyle. In Jonathan Freedman's description of Lambert Strether's experience, we can see shades of Guy's. Freedman writes that:

Strether's experience in Paris transvalues the claims of Wildean aesthetics. As Strether pursues the aesthete's path in Paris, he traces out a trajectory that leads him from moralism to a sensual intoxication to its sober weighing of the motives and costs of Wildean aestheticism. Stretherian aestheticism, like its Wildean forbear, is a matter of sensibility, not the senses; it is allied with, but ultimately detached from, the games of social will-to-power in which Wilde's aesthetes were engaged; and its end brings the further enlargement of a ruefully enlightened consciousness, not the transitory fulfillments of sensual desire. (169)

Though Freedman speaks of *The Ambassadors*, we can certainly see how James uses the same evolutionary bout with what he casts as Wildean aesthetics as a way to enlighten, even enhance, his theatrical hero's keen sensibility and perceptive consciousness. Like Strether, Guy "traces a trajectory that leads him from moralism to a sensual intoxication to its sober weighing of the motives and costs of Wildean aestheticism." Guy's practice of Devenish's (Wilde's) aesthetic philosophy ultimately leads him to invent a school of artistic thought that balances moralism and aestheticism.

However, a close reading of *An Ideal Husband* shows that Wilde, as he portrays himself through his stage directions and his self-fashioned philosopher Lord Goring, does not resemble Devenish in his treatment of art. Unlike Devenish, Wilde is able to see beyond commodified art's material value, and though he does not necessarily care for the moral and emotional motive that James valued, he still perceives an imaginative alternative that exceeds an aestheticism of the senses. Through his type reproduction, Wilde practices and encourages a creative response from the consumption of art. Rather than fit his aesthetic philosophy into the Devenish-like box that James casts him in, Wilde posits a superior alternative to mere commodified and luxurious aestheticism of the kind James satirizes in Lord Devenish. Like James's villain, Wilde's villains, (the Baron Arnheim, Mrs. Cheavely, and to an extent, Sir Robert) relish art for its material and monetary value rather than its creative faculty. Mrs. Cheavely most explicitly demonstrates her superficial relationship to commodified art when she steals but never fully understands the diamond brooch.

James found *An Ideal Husband* troubling because its portrayal of creative aesthetics does not fulfill the crassly commercialized aestheticism that he sought to oppose in Wilde. Though he of course could not have read Wilde's inventive stage directions during *An Ideal Husband's*

performance, he could at least recognize the vulgarly insensitive characteristics of his own villain Lord Devenish in Wilde's villains and not in the play's protagonist, Goring. Thus James and Wilde both condemn a crass consumption-oriented model of aesthetics, and while they do not agree on the same alternative (James attached a moral motive to his aesthetic philosophy, and Wilde combined an imaginative element to aesthetic consumption), they at least express similar anxieties about commodified art.

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